



US005237157A

United States Patent [19]

Kaplan

[11] Patent Number: 5,237,157
[45] Date of Patent: Aug. 17, 1993

[54] KIOSK APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR POINT OF PREVIEW AND FOR COMPILATION OF MARKET DATA

- [75] Inventor: Joshua D. Kaplan, San Francisco, Calif.
[73] Assignee: Intouch Group, Inc., San Francisco, Calif.
[21] Appl. No.: 957,444
[22] Filed: Oct. 6, 1992

Related U.S. Application Data

- [63] Continuation of Ser. No. 582,253, Sep. 13, 1990, abandoned.
[51] Int. Cl.⁵ G06F 15/21
[52] U.S. Cl. 235/375; 235/380; 364/401
[58] Field of Search 369/33, 34; 235/375, 235/380, 381, 382, 383, 385, 462; 358/335; 364/401, 402, 403, 410

References Cited

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

3,718,906	2/1973	Lightner	235/381
3,990,710	11/1976	Hughes	369/34
4,359,631	11/1982	Lockwood et al.	235/381
4,414,467	11/1983	Gould et al.	235/381
4,528,643	7/1985	Freney, Jr.	364/900
4,674,055	6/1987	Ogaki et al.	364/410
4,766,581	8/1988	Korn et al.	235/381
4,780,599	10/1988	Baus	235/385
4,866,661	9/1989	de Prins	235/385

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Sony Auto Disc Loader CDK-006.
Digidesign Sound Tools.
TOPIX CD Premaster/Encoding System.
K. Hedlund, "CD-ROM", *Computer Reseller News* Mar. 21, 1988.

J. Rothfeder and J. Bartimo, "How Software is Making Food Sales a Piece of Cake", *Business Week* Jul. 2, 1990.
M. Bluestone, "Thanks to CDs, Listening Booths are Making a Comeback", *Business Week* May 9, 1988.
Virgin Records, Votan, Inc., Fremont, Calif.
D. Steinberg, "McKesson Data Kiosks Build Business for Its Customers", *PC Week* Mar. 3, 1988.
Los Angeles Times, "Automated Movie Ticket Machines Due".
Pollack, "A Credit Card Offshoot Blossoms" *New York Times* vol. 139 col. 3 pC1(N) pD1(N) Aug. 3, 1990.
Val J. Golding, *The Telephone Software Connection, Inc.* May 1980.
C. Barney, "Business Software Moves Over Phones", *Electronics* Jul. 28, 1983.
J. Beckett, "Safeway to Let Customers Do Self-Checkout", *The San Francisco Chronicle*.
"Introduction to Personics: New Revenues for Artists, Songwriters, Publishers, Record Companies and Retailers", *The Personics System*.
"Executive Summary" PICS Preview from *The Retail Network*.

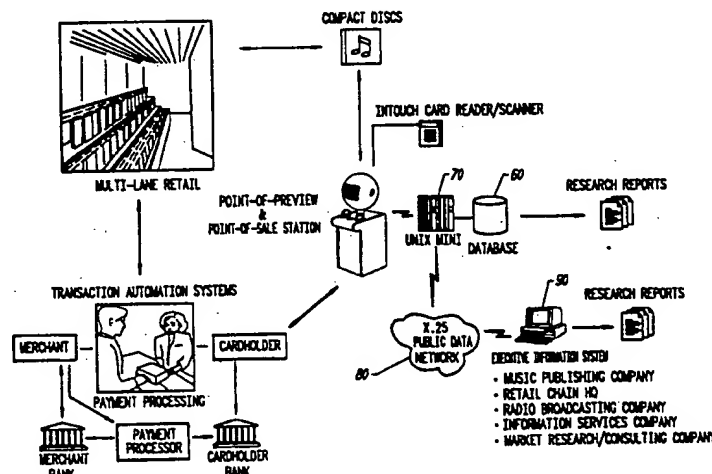
Primary Examiner—Robert A. Weinhardt
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Limbach & Limbach

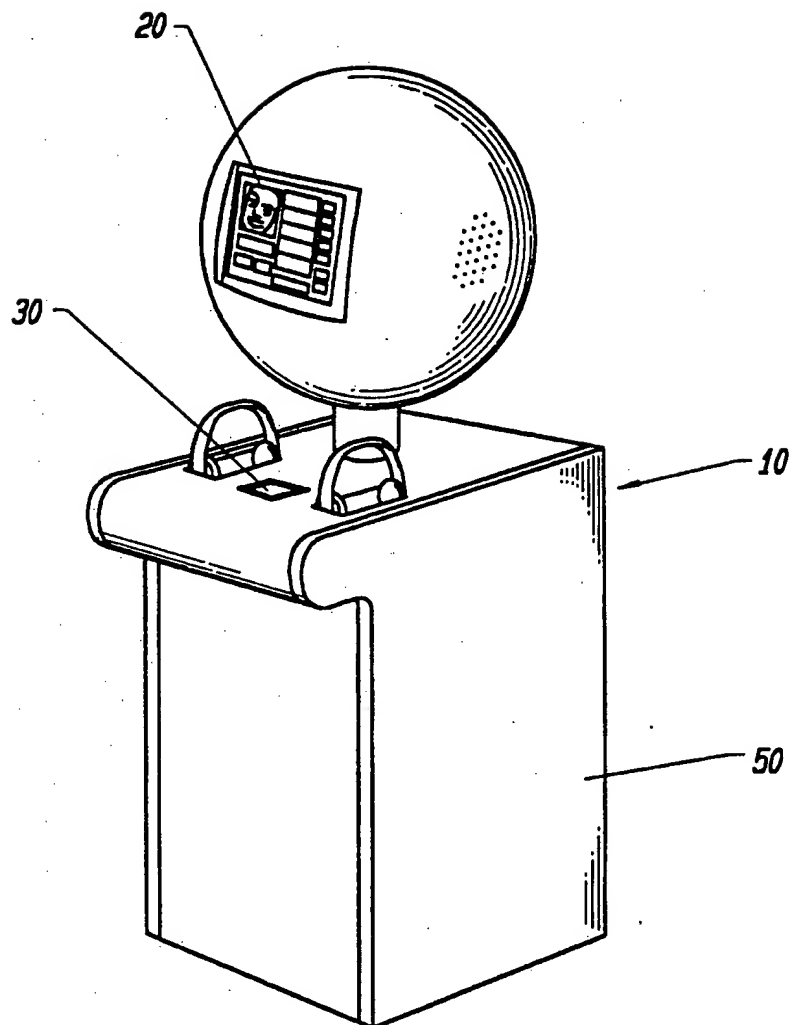
[57]

ABSTRACT

This invention relates to a system for user-interactive multimedia based point-of-preview. The apparatus has data storage for storage of discrete increments of information intended for subscriber selection and preview. After subscriber selection, a programmable data processor selects from storage and then transmits at least one discrete increment of information to a display means for subscriber review. Subscriber selection and profile data are collected and stored. The invention also provides for transmission of subscriber selection and subscriber profile data to a central database for collection and processing by the central processing unit. This system is used, in a particular embodiment, to preview audio programs on compact disks.

11 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



**FIG. 1**

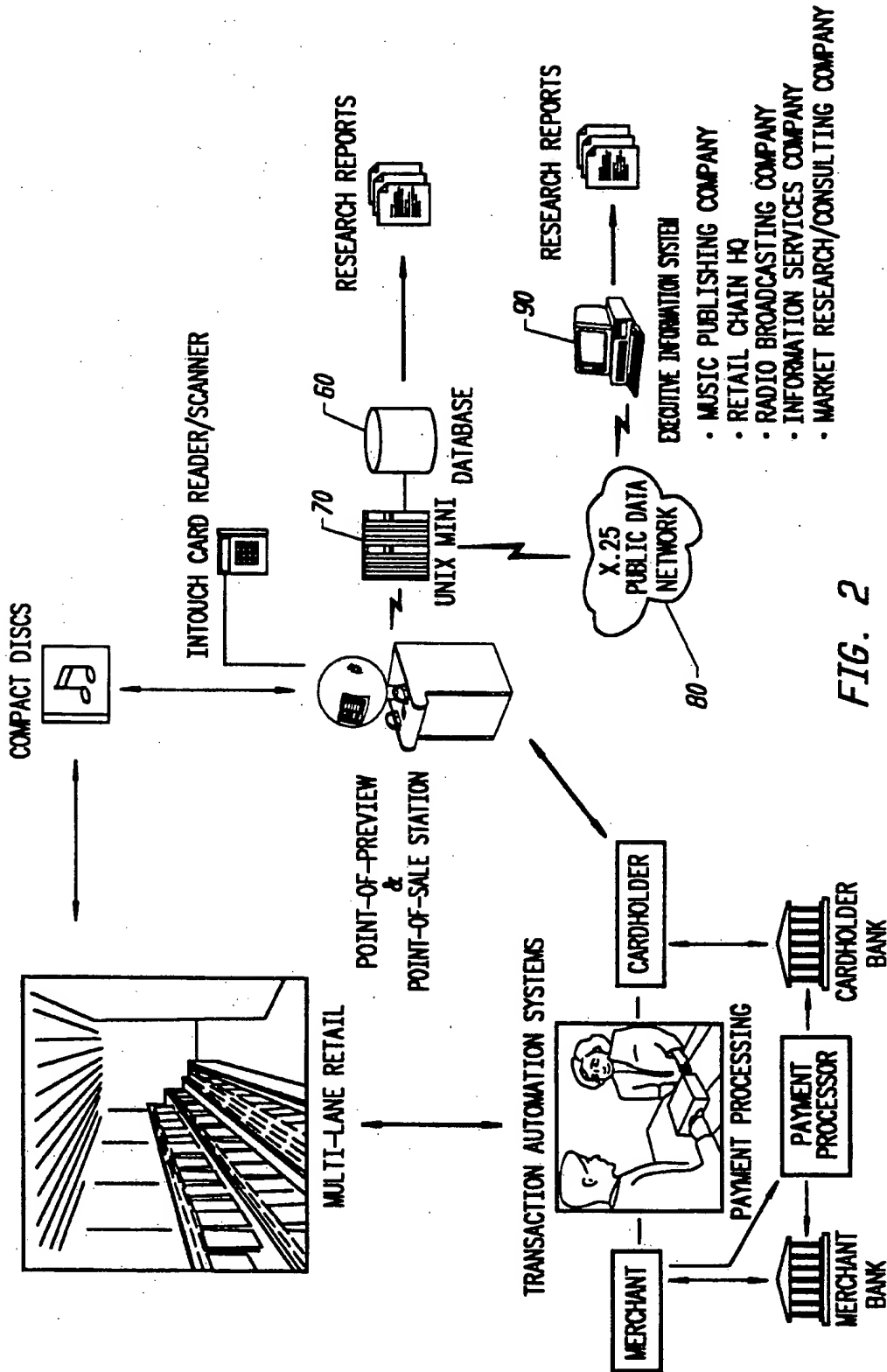


FIG. 2

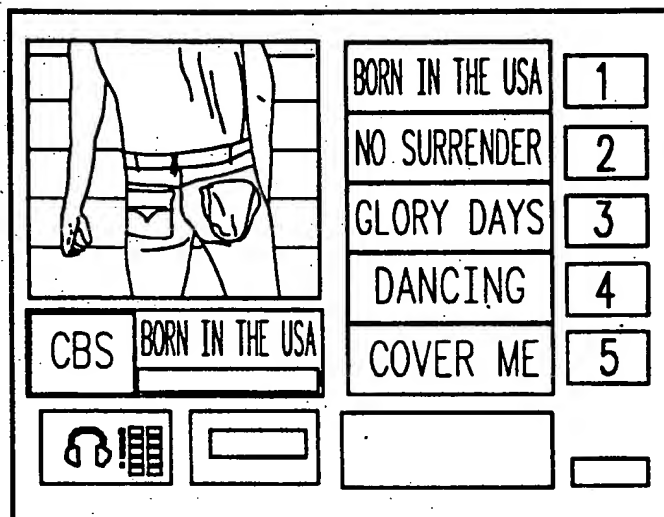


FIG. 3

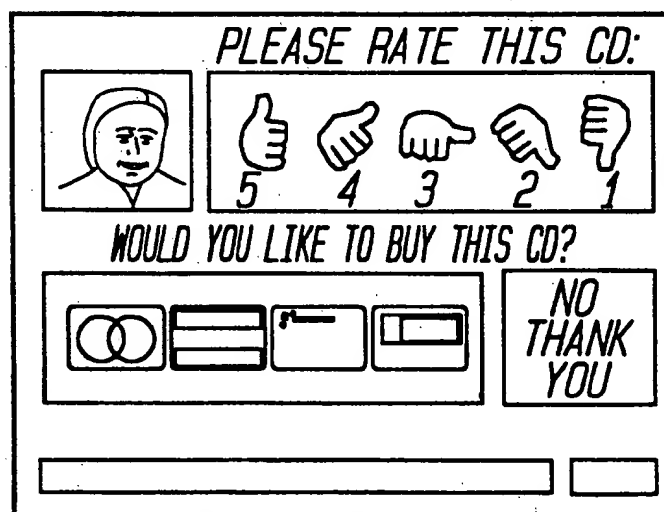


FIG. 4

KIOSK APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR POINT OF PREVIEW AND FOR COMPILATION OF MARKET DATA

This is a continuation of co-pending application Ser. No. 07/582,253, now abandoned, filed on Sep. 13, 1990.

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates generally to the use of CD-ROM stored audio and video data and to point of sale preview apparatus, and more particularly this invention relates to a kiosk for the playback of selected data fragments in response to a user authorization signal and to a user selection signal.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a system for user-interactive multimedia based point-of-preview at a remote location, particularly for use in the music industry.

The 1980s witnessed a tremendous rise in consumer demand for home entertainment products particularly for the compact disc player. Wide consumer acceptance has been the result of more affordable ownership costs, superior sonics (compared with LPs and cassettes) and remarkable ease-of-use. In the United States alone, total sales of CD players skyrocketed from 1.2 million units in 1985 to over 17 million units in 1989 (over three times the growth rate of VCRs). CD players now represent one third of all new audio component sales with projections pointing to total U.S. sales topping 30 million players in the U.S. by 1991—making the CD player the fastest growing consumer electronics product in the last twenty-five years.

Despite the explosion of CD player sales, most consumers own very few CDs (studies indicate the average CD player owner possess only nine discs). When it comes to purchasing a specific compact disc, the consumer is faced with several constraints and dilemmas. Compact discs are roughly twice the retail price (\$14-\$16) of LPs and cassettes and as a result, the consumer is more reluctant to explore new and/or unproven artists for fear of wasting money. Moreover, there is the issue of "selection stress", a common problem for the average music buyer who is confronted with an enormous catalogue from which to choose and few mechanisms to assist him or her in evaluating these choices. The typical retail music store has developed the "superstore" format in which to promote its products, yet salespeople generally have not kept pace with the sophistication of the market. Hence, consumers are at a clear disadvantage. They cannot sample or interact with the product while in the music store and they cannot return products they do not like. Although many consumers wish to build larger collections, buying decisions are often risky and mistakes are costly.

At the artist level, the proliferation of new music markets, styles and tastes has caused the number of record labels to increase dramatically. The record industry has expanded from several major labels in 1970 to more than 2,500 distributed and independent labels today. Each year more than 2,500 new artists are introduced into an already crowded market.

Currently, label executives have no way to test market their respective acts or albums before dollars are committed to the production, promotion and distribution process. Further there is no current methodology to build consumer awareness of the act, or to increase

the act's base outside of radio and television or concert tours. Print media is heavily utilized by the retail music stores to draw attention to new and old labels and special promotions. This activity is heavily subsidized by the music label to promote their individual artist.

Each label is responsible for the recruitment, development and promotion of individual artists. The glut of records inhibits exposure at the retail level and over the airways. Some record companies have been compelled to establish marketing promotions where records are given away to promote awareness of certain acts. Because a greater investment of time, money and creativity is required to develop many of today's acts, label managers acknowledge that they are more likely than ever to cut short promotion in order to cut their losses quickly on albums that don't show early signs of returning the investment. This strongly limits the potential for success because some artists require longer and more diverse promotion.

One type of music sampling device is called PICS Previews. Although it permits some in store sampling, its use is severely limited. Its primary format is based on the hardware configuration and is not easily modifiable. The device incorporates a television screen with a large keypad covered with miniature album covers, and these are locked into a laser disk player. A master disk which holds a fixed number of videoclips—usually about 80—is used as the source of music information. The consumer is permitted to view a video which represents a selection from the album. However, information from only those artists who have made a video and who are featured on the PICS can be accessed. The consumer cannot make his own selection. The selections are not necessarily those that are in the store inventory.

Another in-store device traded as Personics System provides the user with the ability to make customized tapes from selected music stored on the machines. This device is expensive to use and is time consuming. Exposure to artists is limited. The device is viewed by record production companies as cannibalistic. Record production companies have been reluctant to permit the new songs of their top artists to be presented on these devices.

Presently, the store clerk or cashier tends to utilize the in-store sound system to develop their individual musical tastes. Selection tends to be progressive, with little consumer appeal.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a user-interactive multimedia based point-of-preview system. In particular, there is provided interactive digital music sampling kiosks to the retail music industry. The listening booth of the 1950s has been reborn and through the application of software and hardware technology has been brought into the next century.

Through the kiosk station which acts as a computer age "listening booth", the consumer as a subscriber is put in contact with his purchases by having offered the ability to preview music before purchasing selections at record stores. The guesswork is taken out of music buying by offering more informed purchase decisions comparable with those available for other consumer products.

The kiosk station provides access to music products through sampling individual selections as discrete increments of information and allows the subscriber to make more educated purchases. The kiosk station will

thereby dramatically change the way in which consumers purchase music. This increases buying activity and improves overall customer satisfaction. Moreover, the present invention stimulates sales gains for the record stores and provides record companies a cheaper and more effective promotional alternative which can sample consumer opinions at the point-of-sale level.

The present invention utilizes a graphical interface software, a hi-resolution touchscreen monitor, and unprecedented storage capacity. Each system can offer the consumer the ability to preview selections from up to 25,000 albums, thus allowing more informed purchasing decisions by listening to songs on an album in a mode as uninhibited as using a telephone. The customer simply takes any music selection in the store display and approaches the kiosk. After scanning their user/subscriber card (free to the user, available at the store counter) across the UPC bar code reader, the customer scans their chosen audio selection and up on the touch screen monitor appears the album cover in full color photographs along with songs from the album. The user then simply touches the name of the desired song on the screen, and, through the privacy of headphones, listens to a 30 second clip of the audio program. Additional options include full motion MTV videos or Rolling Stone record reviews. The listening booth of the 1950s has been reborn and through the application of software and hardware technology, brought into the 1990s.

Because of the high level of software content, the present invention remains flexible and dynamic. The interactive touchscreen can be programmed to accommodate multiple applications running under one environment on one system. Touchscreen interface can be continually modified with additional features added over time. This encourages subscriber interest and permits a competitive advantage over competitors who have locked their design into predominately hardware configurations with little value-added software content.

The selection and input data from the subscriber is collected from each kiosk location and is transmitted to be stored in a central database for analysis by the central processing unit. Through the central processing unit, the subscriber selection and subscriber profile data can be analyzed, packaged, and distributed as information products to the entire music industry as timely and focused market research.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a computer age "listening booth." Consumers will be offered the ability to preview music before purchasing selections at record stores. Preview and associated purchase data is collected and stored to provide music industry market research data.

Another object of the present invention is to take the "guesswork" out of music buying offering more informed purchase decisions comparable with those available for other consumer products. The present invention provides access to music products through sampling of individual selections and allows the consumer to make more educated purchases. This increases buying activity and improves overall customer satisfaction.

Further objects and advantages of this invention will become more apparent in light of the following drawings and description of the preferred embodiments of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a typical apparatus used in the invention.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram showing the functions of devices which comprise the apparatus of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a view of a typical touchscreen software generated display interface used in the apparatus of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a different view of a typical touchscreen software generated display interface used in the apparatus of the present invention having further a point-of-purchase capacity.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

The present invention will be described here with reference to sampling and previewing audio compact discs, but those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that other applications are possible and are intended to be within the scope of the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 1 of the drawings, there is a kiosk station 10 shown embodying the principles of this invention. The kiosk station 10 utilizes a custom, graphical interface (not shown), proprietary software, a hi-resolution touchscreen monitor 20, and data storage capacity. Each kiosk station 10 is provided with data compression technology which is state-of-the-art. The data compression technology is available from Fredericks and Shoe in Chicago, Illinois. The core of the kiosk station 10 is this digital compression technology, coupled with the storage and playback design. An application specific integrated circuit (ASIC) chip serves in the data compression and decoding component of the kiosk station 10. This ASIC firmware is integrated onto a custom-designed board which delivers 24 bit graphics, full motion video digital signal processing and decompression of the audio information to the subscriber. The new combination of bus technology provides for a high resolution, high quality, user friendly subscriber interface at the kiosk station 10.

On an ongoing basis music CDs are identified for addition to the kiosk station 10 storage. Once the audio samples are identified, the samples are encoded at the CD authoring station. Music CDs are digitized and encoded for storage on a CD ROM discs. The record jacket associated with each preview album is scanned and digitized. A Macintosh Sound Tool, which is a stereo direct-to-disc recording and playback system is used to process the digital signal to the CD. A Topiz CD Premaster/Encoding System or the like is used. In addition, manufacturers' UPC bar code data corresponding to the selected albums is copied and stored. The compression technology permits high capacity storage on CD ROM discs in the kiosk body 50. Each kiosk station 10 can offer the subscriber the ability to preview selections from up to 25,000 albums, thereby allowing more informed purchasing decisions by listening to songs on an album in a mode as uninhibited as using a telephone. Preview selections may be expanded or changed by changing the data on the CD ROM discs. The CD ROM discs are stored in a CD automatic disc loader. A Sony Auto Disc Loader CDK-006 can be used. This loader can house up to 60 CD ROM discs and is controlled by an external 8-bit microprocessor control system. When a subscriber scans in an album and touches selections, the disc loader will automatically scan to the appropriate slot on the disk tray. An Apple MacIntosh platform is used with a CDSC which is a CD ROM drive capable of reading data and audio disks or the like. CD ROM interface can be accom-

plished with a Hypercard or its equivalent. In addition, the database code will create a file for data collection each time a subscriber begins a preview session. This will identify a specific subscriber with the selections and ratings which were processed and the kiosk station 10.

To excite the subscriber, and inspire him to pick up an album from the CD rack and preview it on the kiosk station, the retail store can also be provided with a library of CD ROM discs. For example, 600 minutes of top 200 song cuts can be offered on a single CD ROM disc. These discs can be played for an entire 10 hours period without changing. The length of the CD means that there is no recurring pattern or loop. Musical selections will vary from Rock, to Jazz, to Classical, etc. with widespread appeal. This CD ROM disc sampler will contain songs from albums found on the kiosk station. In that way, a subscriber can become interested in a cut heard over the store's in-house sound system, approach the clerk and ask for the album or the artist responsible, and then proceed to pick out their selection.

To use the invention, the subscriber takes any music selection in the store display and approaches the kiosk station 10. The subscriber is provided with an access card, similar to a credit card, which is used to activate the kiosk station 10. The system interface is based on a touchscreen 20 and activated by the access card which is passed over a UPC scanner. There is no keyboard to add to levels of confusion or intimidation.

Each customer can complete a brief membership application which asks for basis demographic information, general music listening preferences and buying habits and an access card will then be generated for that subscriber. Each subscriber will have a barcode on their access card which will immediately identify them when beginning a session on the kiosk station 10. The subscriber identification can be further interfaced with the music store cash register so that with each music purchase following CD preview, the transaction will be identified as a kiosk-related sale.

A program similar to an airline frequent flyer club can be generated. The central database 60 can maintain a library of subscribers with subscriber profile information and specific preview activity. In order to incentivize subscribers to use the kiosk station 10 regularly, subscribers will earn bonus points for answering the rating questions after previewing selections at the kiosk station 10. Earned bonus points will also accumulate for kiosk-related purchases. Through a combination of rating and purchase bonus points, subscribers will become eligible for discounted and even free music sponsored by music industry participants.

Subscribers may additionally be sent quarterly statements showing a list of albums previewed and kiosk-related purchases. Listings of new releases on the kiosk stations 10, as well as various promotions sponsored by recording labels and music stores, can be disseminated to the subscribers by generation of a news letter update. Subscriber mailing lists can be used to send additional promotional material.

After scanning the access card across the barcode reader 30 which can use multiple mirrors to enhance the scan rate for a dense scan such as the MS 700 manufactured by Metrologic of Camden, New Jersey, the subscriber scans the bar code of the CD chosen, and up on the touchscreen 20 appears the album cover in full color photographs along with songs from the album. The subscriber then touches the desired song at the desired

location of the touchscreen 20 and through the headphones 40 listens to a 30 second clip. Additional options include full motion MTV videos or record reviews.

The access card which is used to activate the kiosk station 10 can be used to monitor all subscriber activities and to generate, for example, demographic information and market research.

Referring now to FIG. 2 there is shown a block diagram demonstrating the apparatus including the storage and transmission to a centralized database 60 for analysis by the central processing unit 70. Each time a subscriber activates the kiosk at the scanner 50 to begin a session, a data file is created identifying the subscriber and generating a selection preview. Additional information in the form of responses to rating questions for the selection CD and purchase indications can also be captured in the data file. The centralized database 60 can poll each kiosk station 10 at all of the remote locations through a telecommunications link. The information gathered will be analyzed and packaged into market research products for distribution in the record industry and radio stations.

FIG. 2 demonstrates that the selection choice and subscriber data can be transmitted via a public data network 80 for analysis by use of an Executive Information System (EIS) 90. Such systems provide the capabilities to analyze vast amounts of data and to convert this data into useful information on a real-time basis. EIS's allow non-programmers access to large quantities of data through an intuitive user interface. EIS's have built in tools which make modelling much easier than conventional spreadsheet or database software. The software and technical support of a major telecommunications and information network, such as Comshare, can be used. This EIS software operates in a distributed and portable environment. In addition, the EIS used will be supported on multiple platforms and operating systems. This provides for delivery of proprietary data and its analysis appropriate to the business needs of the record industry. A key attribute to most EIS systems is the provision for multidimensional data dimensions which, in the music industry, may include unit sales, time periods, geographic markets, specific music categories, configuration breakdowns, and demographic profiles of the subscriber base. The capabilities of CD ROM discs will allow for the periodic delivery of market research to the record industry on CD ROM discs.

FIGS. 3 and 4 show various software configured touchscreen display interfaces. Because the touchscreen is matrix generated by software configuration, it is flexible and dynamic. The touchscreen can be programmed to accommodate multiple applications running under one environment on one system as demonstrated in FIGS. 3 and 4. The software configuration provides for modified with additional features added over time by software modification.

Accordingly, modifications and variations to which the invention is susceptible may be practiced without departing from the scope and intent of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for enabling a user to preview a pre-recorded music product contained in a package, without directly accessing the information on that specific packaged pre-recorded music product available for sale by opening the packaging, using a kiosk having memory means containing prestored, audio information relating to the pre-recorded music product available for sale, the

prestored information including preselected portions of the pre-recorded music product available for sale, interactive audio/video playback means including output means and user-interactive data storage processing and control means, wherein said method comprises the steps of:

- a) entering a subscriber code at the kiosk user-interactive data storage processing and control means to authorize the user's access to, and use of the kiosk interactive audio-video playback means;
- b) identifying a pre-recorded music product to the kiosk for user previewing by supplying a music product code from the specific music product packaging to the kiosk user-interactive data storage processing and control means; and,
- c) previewing prestored preselected portions of the identified pre-recorded music product by interaction of the user with the kiosk audio/video playback means and with the user-interactive data storage processing and control means to audibly preview prestored preselected portions of the music product,

wherein the user interacts with the kiosk to preview prestored preselected portions of the pre-recorded music product without having to open the packaging containing the specific pre-recorded music product to be previewed by the user.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein the kiosk has optical scanning means for reading bar code, and the subscriber code is entered at the kiosk by scanning a subscriber card marked with a bar code over the kiosk optical scanning means, the optical scanning means communicating with the user-interactive data storage processing and control means.

3. A method according to claim 1 wherein the subscriber code is entered at the kiosk by use of the interactive audio/video playback means to enter the subscriber code, the playback means communicating with the user-interactive data storage processing and control means.

4. A method according to claim 1 wherein the kiosk has optical scanning means for reading bar codes and the user identifies the pre-recorded music product for previewing to the kiosk by presenting a pre-recorded music product bearing a bar code to the kiosk optical scanning means.

5. A method according to claim 1 wherein the user identifies the pre-recorded music product for previewing to the kiosk by interacting with the interacting audio/video playback means which displays to the user the pre-recorded music products available for previewing on the kiosk.

6. A method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of:

- selectively previewing preselected portions of a second music product available for sale which is related to the first pre-recorded music product identified to the kiosk in step (b) by action of the kiosk user-interactive data storage processing and control

trol means and kiosk memory means, and by interaction of the user with the interactive audio/video playback means to audibly preview preselected portions of the second pre-recorded music product.

7. A method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of:

- inputting data concerning the user's opinion of the pre-recorded music product identified to the kiosk, the data input occurring by interaction of the user with the kiosk interactive audio/video playback means.

8. A method according to claim 1 wherein step (b) precedes step (a).

9. A method according to claim 5 wherein the user identifies the pre-recorded music product for previewing by using a keyboard.

10. A method according to claim 5 wherein the user identifies an addition pre-recorded music product for previewing by using a touch screen.

11. In an apparatus for subscriber previewing of a pre-recorded music product on a kiosk having memory means containing prestored audio information relating to the pre-recorded music product available for sale, the information including preselected portions of the pre-recorded music product available for sale, interactive audio/video playback means including output means and user-interactive data storage processing and control means, wherein said apparatus in routine use involves a user entering a subscriber code to the user-interactive data storage processing and control means, identifying to the apparatus a music product to be previewed, and previewing prestored selections from the music product,

a method for gathering subscriber pre-recorded product preview selection data for market research which comprises:

- a) during routine use of the kiosk, storing user subscriber code information and kiosk-user pre-recorded music product identification information in the user-interactive data storage processing and control means;
- b) gathering demographic information about the subscriber and correlating it with the subscriber code;
- c) correlating user subscriber code information with subscriber pre-recorded music product identification information; and,
- d) gathering market research data by accessing the kiosk user-interactive data storage processing and control means to obtain pre-recorded music product identification information correlated with the subscriber code information,

wherein demographic information about the subscriber gathered in the subscription process is used in conjunction with the accessed information to provide pre-recorded music product preview selection data for market research.

* * * * *



US005629867A

United States Patent [19]
Goldman

[11] **Patent Number:** **5,629,867**
 [45] **Date of Patent:** **May 13, 1997**

[54] **SELECTION AND RETRIEVAL OF MUSIC FROM A DIGITAL DATABASE**

[76] **Inventor:** Robert J. Goldman, 100 W. Broadway, #7P, Long Beach, N.Y. 11561

[21] **Appl. No.:** 186,302

[22] **Filed:** Jan. 25, 1994

[51] **Int. Cl.⁶** H04H 1/00

[52] **U.S. Cl.** 364/514 R; 364/922.7; 381/77; 381/80

[58] **Field of Search** 364/514 A, 514 B, 364/514 C, 514 R, 922.7; 381/77, 80; 395/600, 934

[56] **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

3,291,919	12/1966	Robitaille	179/100.2
4,682,370	7/1987	Matthews	455/166
4,720,873	1/1988	Goodman et al.	455/2
4,920,432	4/1990	Eggers et al.	360/33.1
5,119,188	6/1992	McCalley et al.	358/86
5,127,003	6/1992	Doll, Jr. et al.	370/110.1
5,168,481	12/1992	Culbertson et al.	369/2
5,305,438	4/1994	Mackay et al.	395/164
5,351,276	9/1994	Doll, Jr. et al.	379/67
5,414,455	5/1995	Hooper et al.	348/7
5,526,284	6/1996	Mankovitz	364/514 R
5,539,635	9/1996	Larson	364/401 R
5,557,541	9/1996	Schulhof et al.	364/514 R

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Reuters Info Services (Business Wire), "RCS Acquires Decision Inc.; Offers Complete Software Solution for Radio Station Programming Operations", Feb. 9, 1993.

BPI Communications, "Radio Station Software", Nov. 28, 1992.

McConnell, "The Tapeless Revolution Comes to Radio", Oct. 10, 1994.

IBM Corp. Press Release dated Jan. 20, 1993. Blockbuster and IBM Corp. Press Release dated May 11, 1993.

Primary Examiner—Emanuel T. Voeltz

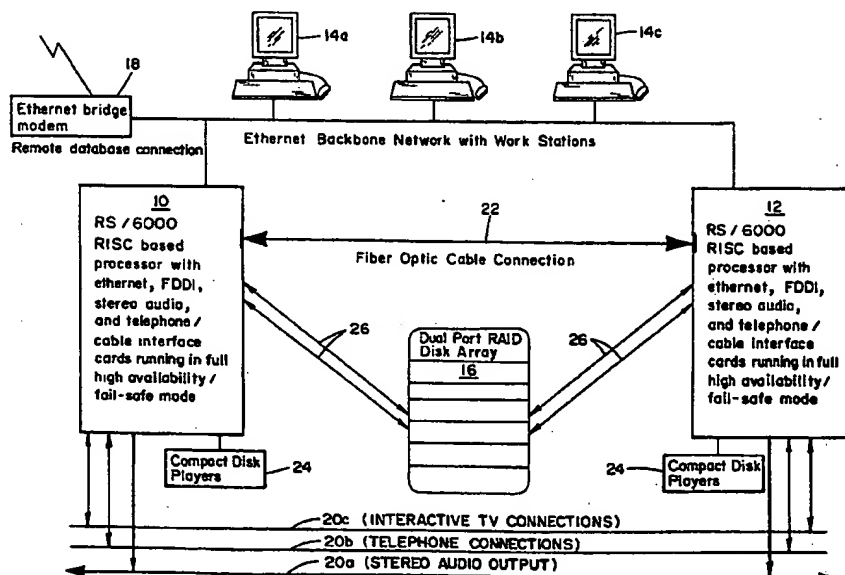
Assistant Examiner—Patrick J. Assouad

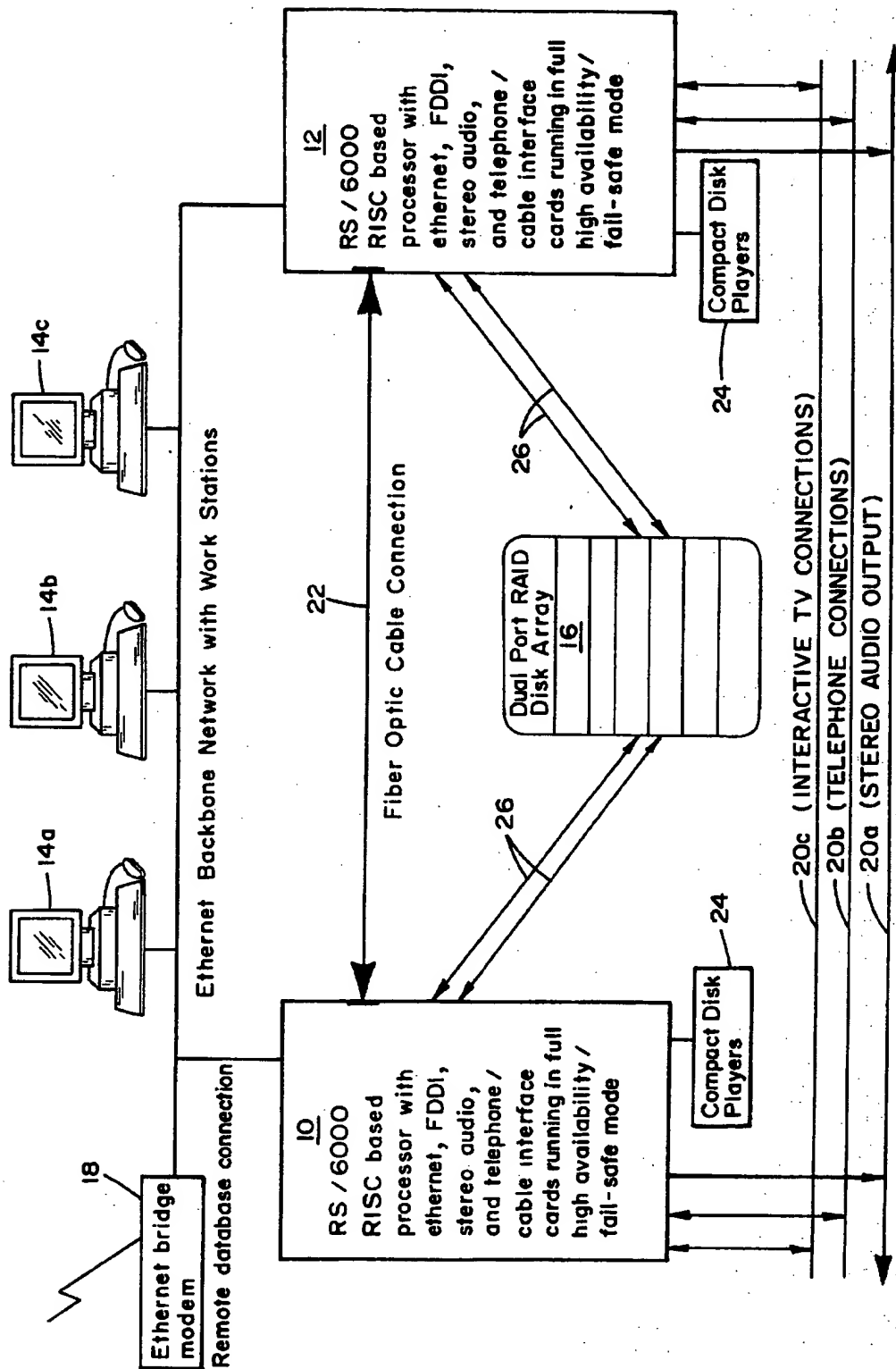
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Scully, Scott, Murphy and Presser

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A digital radio broadcast station which includes a single on-line digital database having stored therein a plurality of at least several hundred (preferably at least 1800) different selections of music to be played and broadcast by the radio station. A processor system is provided for programming the operation of the digital radio broadcast station with a sequence of music selections, which are subsequently retrieved in order from the common digital database and played over the digital radio broadcast station. The single on-line digital database comprises a disk array storage, preferably a dual port RAID disk array. The digital radio broadcast station also includes a plurality of work station consoles for use by personnel responsible for operating the radio station such as disc jockeys and engineers. A bridge network such as a modem is also provided for connecting the radio station to a further digital database for music selections not stored in the common digital database. The processor system is provided with a connection to a telephone network, such that radio station callers can communicate with the radio station by a touch tone telephone, and is also provided with a connection to an interactive cable television network, such that cable television viewers can communicate with the radio station over the interactive cable television network.

10 Claims, 1 Drawing Sheet





SELECTION AND RETRIEVAL OF MUSIC FROM A DIGITAL DATABASE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to a digital audio system for radio stations, and more particularly pertains to a programmable digital audio system for radio stations wherein the music to be played and broadcast over the radio station is stored in a digital database from which it is recalled pursuant to prior programming of the operation of the radio station.

2. Discussion of the Prior Art

Recording of audio music has progressed significantly over the past decade. The introduction of digital audio music has created a revolution in the quality of sound available for home users and for radio stations nationwide. The compact disk has become the standard for high quality digital audio, and has had a high acceptance rate in the marketplace.

In a typical prior art radio station environment, the disks to be played and broadcast are located and retrieved from a CD musical library. The disks are then loaded into a CD player, the music cued to play, and subsequently the disks are returned to the library after play, actions which require time, labor, money and space. With the latest developments in computer technology, many of these steps can be eliminated to result in bottom-line savings to a commercial radio station.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide a digital audio system for radio stations wherein the broadcast music is stored in a digital database to provide a programmable radio station.

The concept of the present invention is relatively straightforward; instead of having the music exist on compact disks, the music is stored in a common digital database which is present in a computer system. The operator only needs to point an arrow at the name of the desired song to be played, press a button and the music is then immediately played in full digital sound. The order of the songs can be programmed in advance and played without staff intervention. Commercials and station promotions can be inserted as needed.

The database is created by loading desired CD tracks from the station CD library once, and additional songs can be loaded as necessary. Once the database is created, the compact disks need not be used again; all music is played directly from the database.

Another feature of the present invention improves the system operation and performance even more. If a song is not available in the radio station's database, it can be transmitted to the system upon request over a telecommunications link that provides music from a master library database to the station's system.

Each system can be customized to the station's operational procedures. The system can adapt current forms and provide any reports that the station currently requires, and station logs can be maintained automatically. All required FCC logs can be automatically recorded, summarized, and printed as required.

The present invention provides substantial cost savings in the operation of a commercial radio station in the following areas:

In staffing, fewer people are required for the station operation. Compact disks no longer need to be taken from

the library and returned after each play. People are not needed to cue songs to play, as it is automatically handled by the system of the present invention.

In space savings, large music libraries are no longer necessary. Music is loaded once in advance into the system, and the source of the music (e.g., CD) need not be stored or saved.

In equipment savings, fewer tape/CD players are necessary, resulting in dramatic maintenance cost savings.

In efficiency, the system of the present invention is very easy to operate. The person in charge of programming selects the music to be played and places the music in a desired program order. A prior day's program can be used as a guide in planning future programming. The system then validates the selections and requests the loading of any material not present either by tapes/CD's or by downloading if available. Work station consoles are available throughout the station for use by engineers, DJ's and others responsible for station operation.

In reliability, a backup computer system automatically takes over for the primary computer system in case of failure. All music in the database can have a second standby copy available and backup power to take over in an emergency, to operate the system in a fail-safe mode.

Listener response can also be implemented into the digital audio system for radio stations of the present invention. A listener call-in number can be tied into the system so that requested songs can be automatically played. Songs can be selected by a touch-tone phone without involving station personnel. A connection can also be made available to local interactive cable TV networks such that subscribers can have the same capabilities via the television set. Listener demographic information can be easily collected, which can be used for advertising, promotional, or programming purposes.

The system of the present invention revolutionizes the way that radio stations operate. Ease of use, cost savings, and increased station efficiency provide a quick return to the station. Additional features and options such as user call-in via telephone or interactive cable television provide tremendous marketing opportunities resulting in more listeners and higher advertising revenues.

In accordance with the teachings herein, the present invention provides a digital radio broadcast station which includes a single on-line digital database having stored therein a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music to be played and broadcast by the radio station. A processor system is provided for programming the digital radio broadcast station with a sequence of music selections, which are subsequently retrieved in order from the common digital database and played over the digital radio broadcast station.

In greater detail, the processor system includes a main computer system for operating the radio station, and also a backup computer system for operating the radio station in the event of a failure of the main computer system. In that regard, a fiber optic cable connects the main computer system with the backup computer system for switching between the main and backup computer systems. The processor system is preferably based upon Reduced Instruction Set Computing (RISC) architecture. The processor system preferably comprises an IBM RS/6000 system with an AIX operating system, and also includes first and second disk drive controllers. The single on-line digital database comprises a disk array storage, preferably a dual port RAID disk array. The digital radio broadcast station also includes a

3

plurality of work station consoles for use by personnel responsible for operating the radio station such as disc jockeys and engineers. A bridge or bridged network which may include a modem is also provided for connecting the radio station to a further digital database for music selections not stored in the common digital database. The processor system is provided with a connection to a telephone network, such that radio station callers can communicate with the radio station by a touch tone telephone. The processor system is also provided with a connection to an interactive cable television network, such that cable television viewers can communicate with the radio station over the interactive cable television network.

The present invention also provides a method for operating a radio station which includes digitally storing in a single on-line digital database, of a computer system, a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music which is to be played and broadcast by the radio station. Pursuant to the method, the computer system is programmed with a sequence of music selections to be played by the radio station, and the programmed sequence of music selections is subsequently retrieved from the common digital database and broadcast over the radio station.

The method of operation preferably utilizes a main computer system for operating the radio station and a backup computer system for operating the radio station in the event of a failure of the main computer system, with the processor systems preferably being based upon reduced instruction set computing architecture. The main computer system and the backup computer system are connected by a fiber optic cable connection for switching between the main and backup computer systems. The method of operation of the radio station also provides a plurality of work station consoles for use by personnel responsible for operating the radio station, such as disc jockeys and engineers. In greater detail, the step of digitally storing includes digitally storing the plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music in a disk array, preferably a dual port RAID disk array. The method of operation of the computer system also provides a bridge or bridged network which may include a modem for connecting the radio station to a further digital database for music selections not stored in the common digital database. The method for operating the radio station also includes inserting commercials and station promotions into the sequence of music selections to be played by the radio station. The method of operation of the radio station also provides a connection to a telephone network, such that radio station callers can communicate with the radio station by a touch tone telephone, and further provides a connection to an interactive cable television network, such that cable television viewers can communicate with the radio station over the interactive cable television network. The method of operation of the radio station also provides a plurality of work station consoles for use by personnel responsible for operating the radio station such as disc jockeys and engineers. The step of digitally storing includes storing the plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music in a disk array, preferably a dual port RAID disk array.

Pursuant to the teachings of the present invention, the single on-line digital database, either at the radio station or provided elsewhere, can also be used to provide an audio on demand service or system. In the audio on demand system, a communications network is provided to users, wherein a user communicates with the computer system over the communications network to indicate a choice of one or more music selections. The choice of one or more music selections is then retrieved from the single on-line digital database and transmitted over the communications network to the user.

4

In greater detail, the communications network can be provided by a telephone system, wherein a user communicates with the computer system by a touch tone telephone to indicate a choice of one or more music selections, and the one or more music selections are then transmitted over the telephone system to the caller. The communications network can also be provided by an interactive cable television network, wherein a user communicates with the computer system over the interactive cable television network to indicate a choice of one or more music selections, and the one or more music selections are then transmitted over the interactive cable television network to the user.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing objects and advantages of the present invention for a digital audio system for radio stations may be more readily understood by one skilled in the art with reference being had to the following detailed description of several preferred embodiments thereof, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawing wherein FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary embodiment of a digital audio system for radio stations constructed pursuant to the teachings of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A digital audio system for radio stations pursuant to the teachings of the present invention can be implemented with the computer hardware illustrated in FIG. 1, which shows one preferred embodiment of a Local Area Network (LAN) for a digital audio system for a radio station. The Local Area Network includes a first RS/6000 processor 10, a second redundant RS/6000 processor 12, a plurality of work stations 14a, 14b, 14c, a Dual Port RAID Disk Array 16, an Ethernet bridge and modem 18 to connect the LAN to a Wide Area Network (WAN), and connections 20a for stereo audio outputs to the radio station transmitter, 20b to telephone lines, and 20c to interactive cable television systems.

Pursuant to the teachings of the present invention, at least one processor 10 is required, but to provide for optimum performance, a processor system based on RISC (Reduced Instruction Set Computing) architecture using two processors 10, 12 is preferred. The processors 10, 12 accommodate the retrieval and output of music stored in memory while providing multiple users concurrent access to the system.

The processor system supports a high-availability processing mode so if one processor system 10 fails, the other processor system 12 immediately takes over without interruption, which is accomplished via a fiber optic cable 22 linking the two processor systems.

The processor systems 10, 12 preferably provide hardware support for the output stereo audio, and preferably are provided with input/output connections based upon SCSI (Small Computer System Interface), which allows connection of multiple compact disk and disk storage units 24 (up to eight) as required.

The processor systems 10, 12 support Ethernet or Token Ring protocols to allow for the connection of multiple terminal devices, such as the work stations 14, and also to provide access to remote databases, as by a bridge or bridged network which may include a modem 18, in a Wide Area Network (WAN).

The processor systems 10, 12 are preferably provided with multiple redundant connections 26 to the disk system 16 to minimize the possibility of system failure, and with connections 20b, 20c to telephone and cable networks to provide for listener opinions and requests.

Based upon commercially available equipment, a preferred processor which fulfills the requirements of the present invention is the RS/6000 system manufactured by IBM Corporation with the following components:

- a. 2 Gigabytes of disk storage in the processor;
- b. a SCSI (Small Computer System Interface) Differential Controller (to provide for connections 26 to the disk drives);
- c. 128 Megabytes of main memory;
- d. FDDI (Fiber Data Distributed Interchange) which is a Fiber adapter (single ring) port for fiber optic connections 22 between the two processors;
- e. Audio capture/playback adapter (audio output from machine to 20a);
- f. Digital tape drive with 5.0 gigabyte capacity for system backup (such as is available in Sony camcorders);
- g. 4 (minimum) CD-ROM drives;
- h. a communications adapter which is for a separate circuit card for connections to telephone/cable systems.

Although not recommended, the dual RISC configuration can be replaced by a single processor or by one based upon a different architecture such as a personal computer. However, if this substitution is made, poor system performance or reliability may result.

Regarding the disk storage 16, the primary requirement for the disk storage is that an on-line database of at least 30 gigabytes be available at any time. This amount of disk allows for the storage of approximately 1800 songs; additional storage can be added as required. The disks are configured so that if one disk unit fails, the system continues operation without interruption.

Additional hardware requirements include:

- a. A second disk drive controller to take over in the event that the first disk drive controller fails;
- b. Access to the disk drive unit from both processors;
- c. Automatic duplication of all data onto a backup disk drive unit; and
- d. The ability to easily replace failed components without system downtime.

These requirements are preferably met by a disk technology called RAID (Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks). Using RAID, any storage subsystem component or processor can fail without affecting the overall operation of the system. The RAIDIANT ARRAY product, available commercially from IBM, when equipped with an additional array controller, fulfills these hardware requirements.

Each work station 14 preferably consists of a 19-inch terminal display and a mouse connected via Ethernet or Token Ring to the main computer system. A minimum of three work stations 14a, 14b, 14c would generally be required to be used by the following individuals:

- a. Station Manager—responsible for selecting and sequencing music and reviewing FCC logs produced by the system;
- b. Engineer—responsible for loading system database and monitoring station operation;
- c. On-Air Personality (DJ)—responsible for integrating the music sequence into an on-air program.

Each work station 14 display is preferably configured to the function to be performed. For example, the station manager's display can present programming options, while the engineer's display can present options relevant to the loading of music into the database. A primary feature of the system is that an individual with little computer experience

can operate the work station easily as all input is entered by a graphical display.

Regarding communications equipment, the system preferably has a connection to optional remote databases via an Ethernet bridge or bridged network which may include a modem 18 and high speed data communication lines. This allows the system to access and download music which is not present in the digital database memory of the radio station's system.

Regarding computer software, particularly the operation system, when using the preferred RISC based processor configuration, a preferred operating system is AIX, commercially available from IBM Corporation, which provides support for the hardware and for easy system operation.

Additional features of AIX include:

- a. On-line access to system documentation;
- b. Support, control and design of the graphical displays used to operate the system;
- c. Support for a high-availability processing mode so that if one processor fails, a second processor takes over immediately;
- d. The ability to access the music stored in digital form and then convert it to audio which is then broadcast by the radio station;
- e. Communications support to allow access to remote systems and databases.

The database manager will generally be custom software written for a particular radio station. The database manager stores the music so that it is available to the radio station, provides the director listings to the user, and determines in which computer system the requested song is located. Due to the unique requirements of the system, the database manager would generally be specifically written for this application.

While several embodiments and variations of the present invention for a digital audio system for radio systems are described in detail herein, it should be apparent that the disclosure and teachings of the present invention will suggest many alternative designs to those skilled in the art.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for operating a digital radio broadcast station comprising:

- a. digitally storing in a single on-line database, of a computer system, a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music which is to be played and broadcast by the radio station;
- b. programming the computer system with a sequence of music selections to be played by the radio station;
- c. retrieving from the single on-line digital database and broadcasting over the radio station the programmed sequence of music selections; and
- d. providing a bridged network for connecting the radio station to a further digital database for music selections not stored in the single on-line digital database.

2. A method for operating a digital radio broadcast station comprising:

- a. digitally storing in a single on-line digital database, of a computer system, a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music which is to be played and broadcast by the radio station;
- b. programming the computer system with a sequence of music selections to be played by the radio station;
- c. retrieving from the single on-line digital database and broadcasting over the radio station the programmed sequence of music selections; and

- d. providing a connection from the computer system to a telephone network, and wherein radio station callers communicate with the radio station by a touch tone telephone.
3. A method for operating a digital radio broadcast station comprising:
- a. digitally storing in a single on-line digital database, of a computer system, a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music which is to be played and broadcast by the radio station;
 - b. programming the computer system with a sequence of music selections to be played by the radio station;
 - c. retrieving from the single on-line digital database and broadcasting over the radio station the programmed sequence of music selections; and
 - d. providing a connection from the computer system to an interactive cable television network, and wherein cable television viewers communicate with the radio station over the interactive cable television network.
4. A digital radio broadcast station comprising:
- a. a single on-line digital database having stored therein a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music to be played and broadcast by the digital radio broadcast station, wherein said single on-line digital database comprises a disk array storage; and
 - b. a processor system for programming the digital radio broadcast station with a sequence of music selections to be retrieved from the single on-line digital database and played over the digital radio broadcast.
5. A digital radio broadcast station as claimed in claim 4, wherein said disk array storage comprises a dual port RAID disk array.
6. A digital radio broadcast station comprising:
- a. a single on-line digital database having stored therein a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music to be played and broadcast by the digital radio broadcast station;
 - b. a processor system for programming the digital radio broadcast station with a sequence of music selections to be retrieved from the single on-line digital database and played over the digital radio station; and
 - c. a bridged network for connecting the radio station to a further digital database for music selections not stored in the single on-line digital database.
7. A digital radio station broadcast comprising:
- a. a single on-line digital database having stored therein a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music to be played and broadcast by the digital radio broadcast station;
 - b. a processor system for programming the digital radio broadcast station with a sequence of music selections to be retrieved from the single on-line digital database and played over the digital radio broadcast station; and

- c. a connection from the processor system to a telephone network, and wherein radio station callers communicate with the radio station by a touch tone telephone.
8. A digital radio broadcast station comprising:
- a. a single on-line database having stored therein a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music to be played and broadcast by the digital radio broadcast station;
 - b. a processor system for programming the digital radio broadcast station with a sequence of music selections to be retrieved from the single on-line digital database station; and
 - c. a connection from the processor system to an interactive cable television network, and wherein cable television viewers communicate with the radio station over the interactive cable television network.
9. A method for operating an audio on demand network comprising:
- a. digitally storing in a single on-line digital database, of a computer system, a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music;
 - b. providing a communications network to users, wherein a user communicates with the computer system over the communications network to indicate a choice of one or more music selections, including providing a connection from the computer system to a telephone network, and wherein a user communicates with the computer system by a touch tone telephone to indicate a choice of one or more music selections, and the one or more music selections are transmitted over the telephone network to the caller; and
 - c. retrieving from the single on-line digital database and transmitting over the communications network to the user the choice of one or more music selections.
10. A method for operating an audio on demand network comprising:
- a. digitally storing in a single on-line digital database, of a computer system, a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music;
 - b. providing a communications network to users, wherein a user communicates with the computer system over the communications network to indicate a choice of one or more music selections, including providing a connection from the computer system to an interactive cable television network, and wherein a user communicates with the computer system over the interactive cable television network to indicate a choice of one or more music selections are transmitted over the interactive cable television network to the user; and
 - c. retrieving from the single on-line digital database and transmitting over the communications network to the user the choice of one or more music selections.

* * * * *



US006578008B1

(12) **United States Patent**
Chacker

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 6,578,008 B1**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Jun. 10, 2003**

(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR AN ONLINE TALENT BUSINESS**

(76) **Inventor:** Aaron R. Chacker, 903 Morgan Rd., Rydal, PA (US) 19046

(*) **Notice:** Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) **Appl. No.:** 09/481,671

(22) **Filed:** Jan. 12, 2000

(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** G06F 17/60

(52) **U.S. Cl.** 705/10

(58) **Field of Search** 705/10

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

5,237,157 A 8/1993 Kaplan
5,629,867 A 5/1997 Goldman
5,758,257 A * 5/1998 Herz et al. 455/2
5,963,916 A * 10/1999 Kaplan 705/26

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

JP 2001041826 A * 2/2002

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Markoff, www.garageband.com/htdb/companyinfo/nytimes12Sep1999.html, Bridging Two Worlds to Make Downloadable Music Profitable, Nov. 17, 1999.

Ganahl, www.garageband.com/htdb/comapnyinfo/sfExaminer26Sep1999.html, Ex-Talking Head Now turning heads for producing records, Nov. 17, 1999.

Luening, www.garageband.com/htdb/companyinfo/cnet30Sep1999.html, Music site brings bands out of the garage, Nov. 17, 1999.

www.garageband.com/htdb/companyinfo/Guardian101499.html, The Guardian, Oct. 14, 1999.

www.billboardtalentnet.com/new_info/artist_eng.html, BTN helps your Act Get Started, Nov. 17, 1999.

www.news.webnoize.com/item.rst48 ID=4203, Rolling Stone Editors to Pick Favorite Unsigned Acts, May 24, 1999.

www.rollingstone.tunes.com/sections/dds/text/artista-g.asp?atl=, Frequently asked questions for Artists, Nov. 17, 1999.

www.mp3.com/abotus.html?hpbbau, About MP3.com, Nov. 17, 1999.

www.iuma.com/About/, About IUMA, It all started at a time when companies weren't formed in Garages, Nov. 17, 1999.

Emusic www.Emusic.com/.

Launch www.launch.com/music.

My MP3 www.my.mp3.com/.

Musicmaker www.musicmaker.com/.

Tunes www.tunes.com/.

(List continued on next page.)

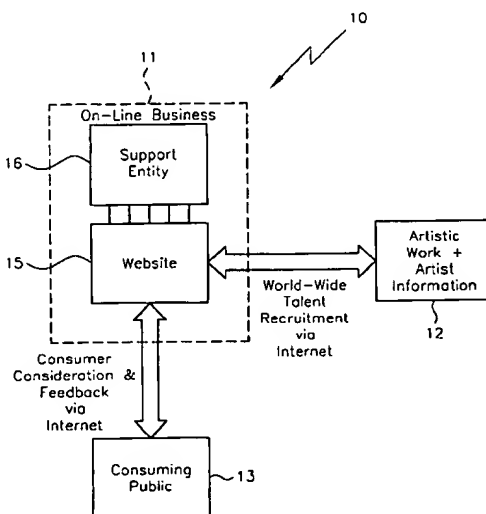
Primary Examiner—Kenneth R. Rice

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Caesar, Rivise, Bernstein, Cohen & Pokotilow, Ltd.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method and system for implementing an online talent business whereby large numbers of unknown artists can have their artistic works made available to the public and wherein the public votes on which artists they like and whereby the online talent business enters into business contracts with the artists based on the public voting. An interactive investment simulation game is also provided for public participation in evaluating the actual demand of unsigned artists. This online talent business is exemplified by an on-line record business but may encompass any online talent business, such as in the modeling industry or in the story-scripting business.

9 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



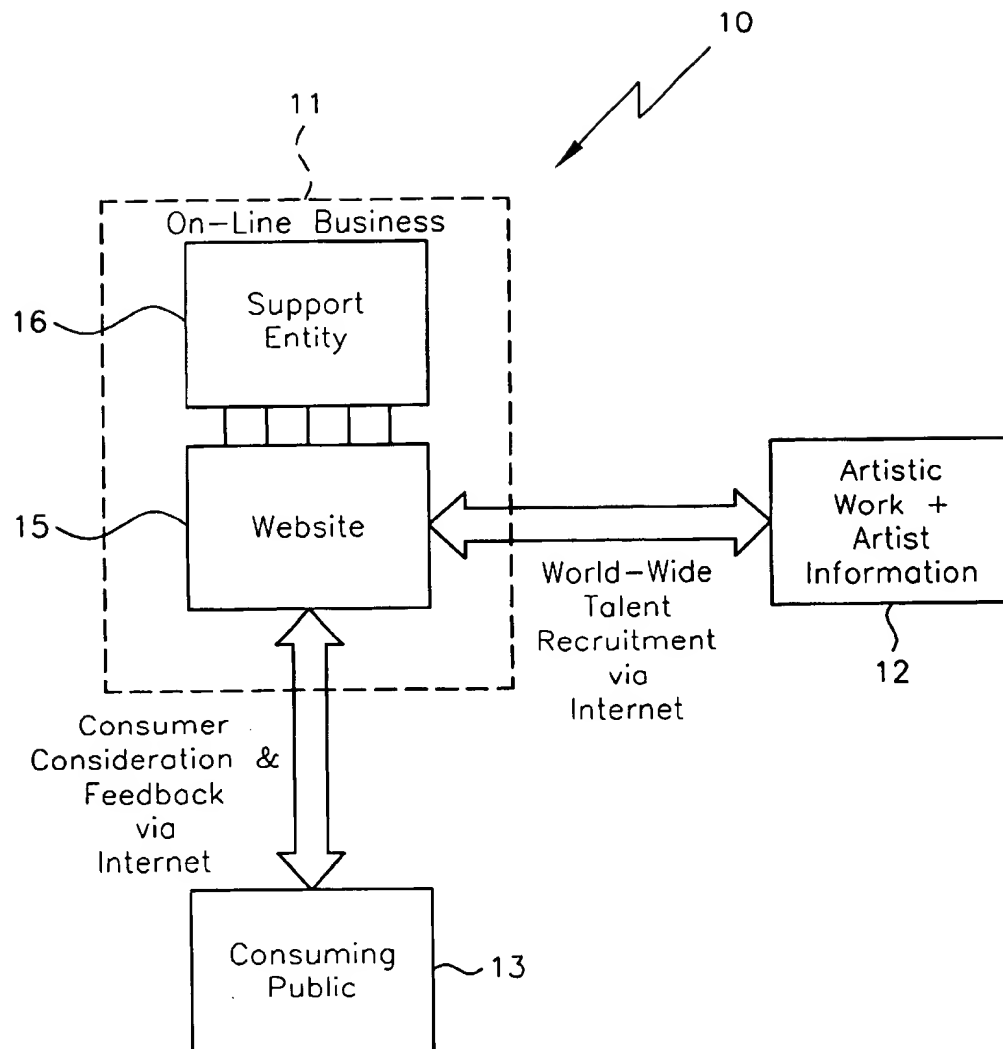
OTHER PUBLICATIONS

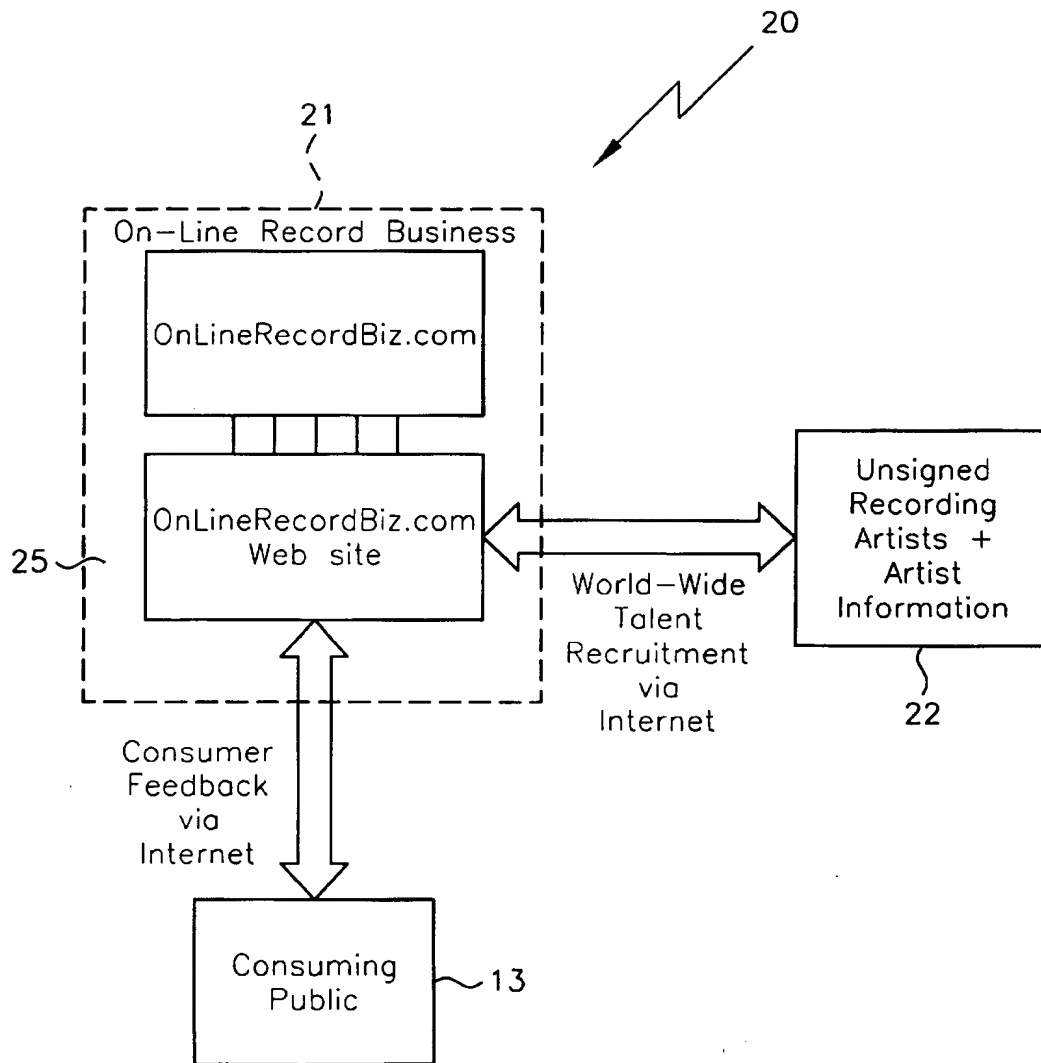
Amazon www.amazon.com/.
cdnow www.cdnow.com/.
AOL www.aol.com/.
Excite www.excite.com/.
Infoseek www.infoseek.go.com/.
Lycos www.lycos.com/.
Yahoo www.yahoo.com/.

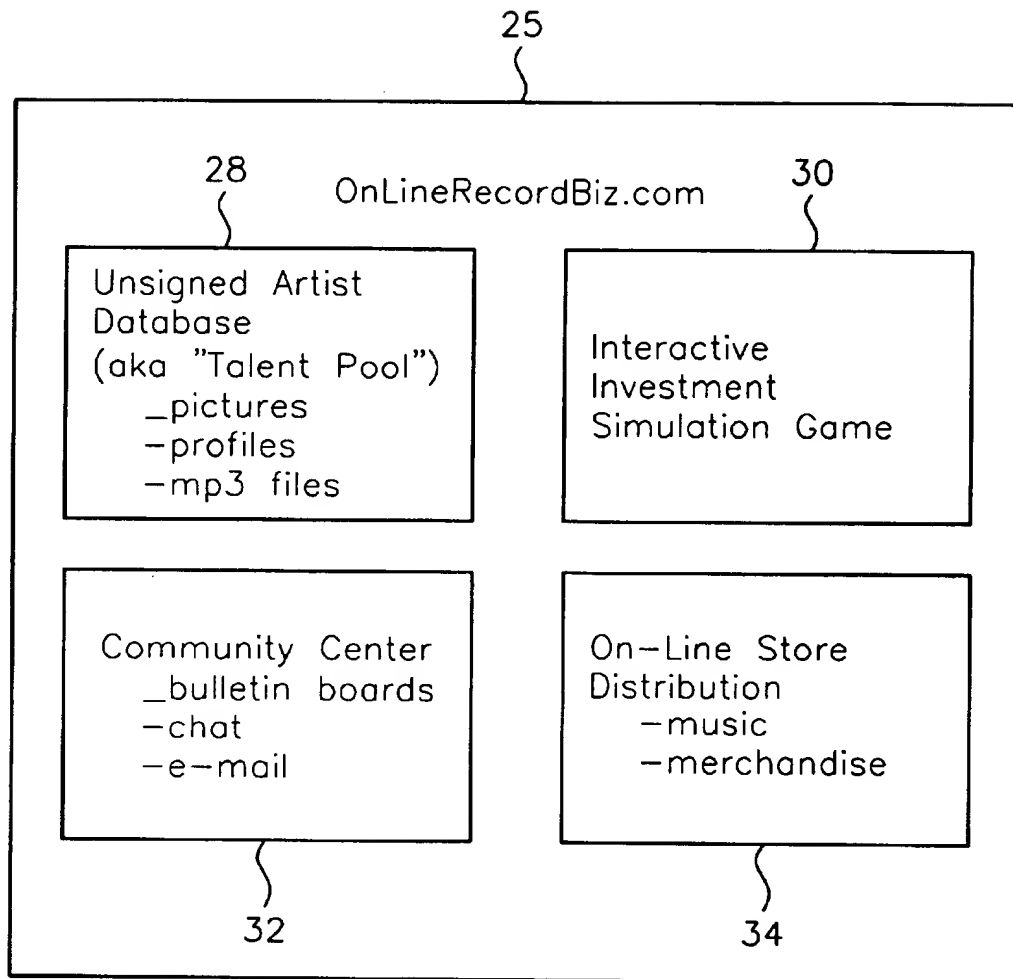
Spinner www.spinner.com/.
Nullsoft www.nullsoft.com/.
Geocities www.geocities.yahoo.com/.
3dfx Index www.3dx.com/home/.
balthaser www.Balthaser.com/.
Miller Brewing Co. www.millerbrewing.com/.
eSignal www.esignal.com/.

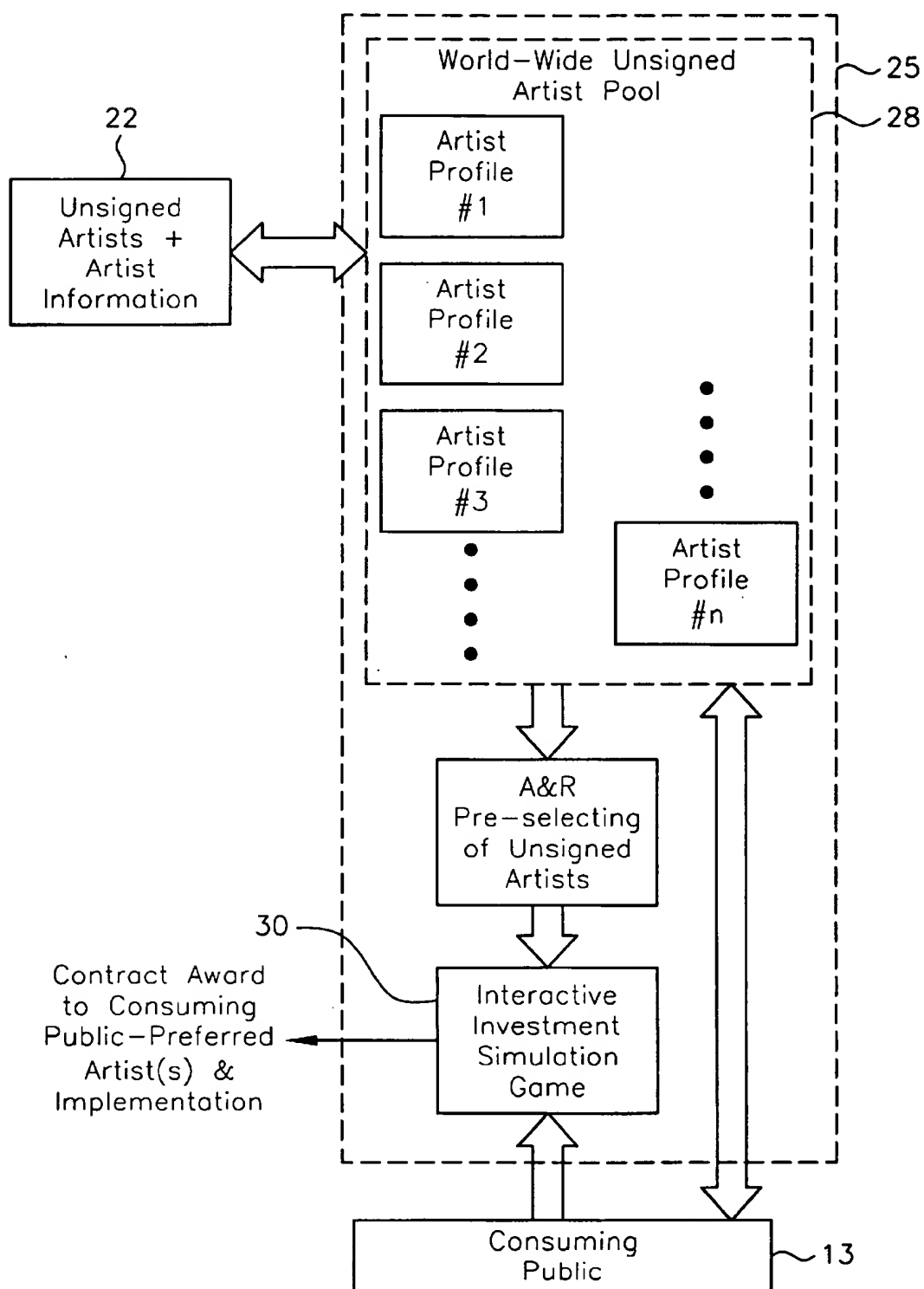
* cited by examiner

2

**FIG. 1**

**FIG. 2**

**FIG. 3A**

**FIG. 3B**

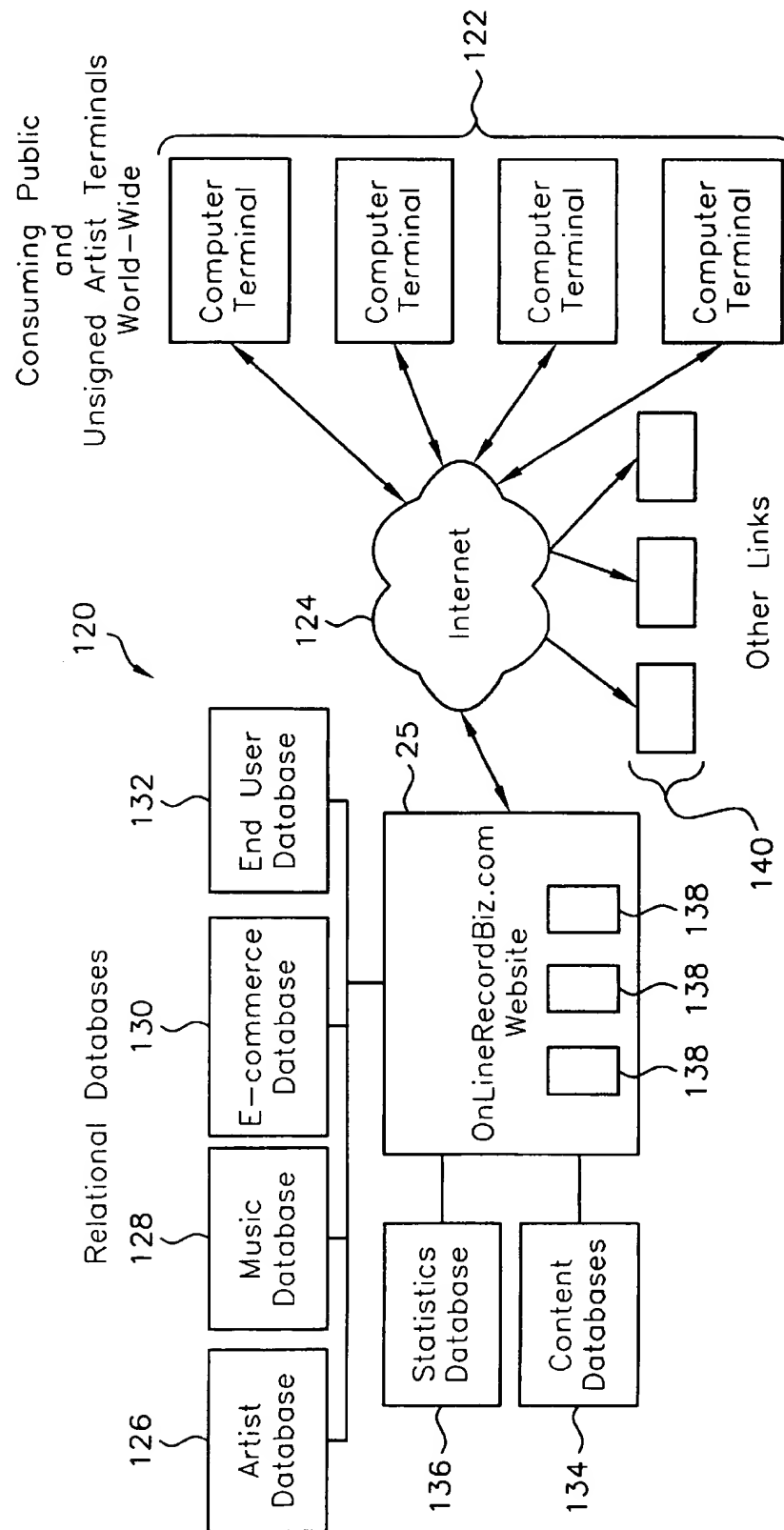
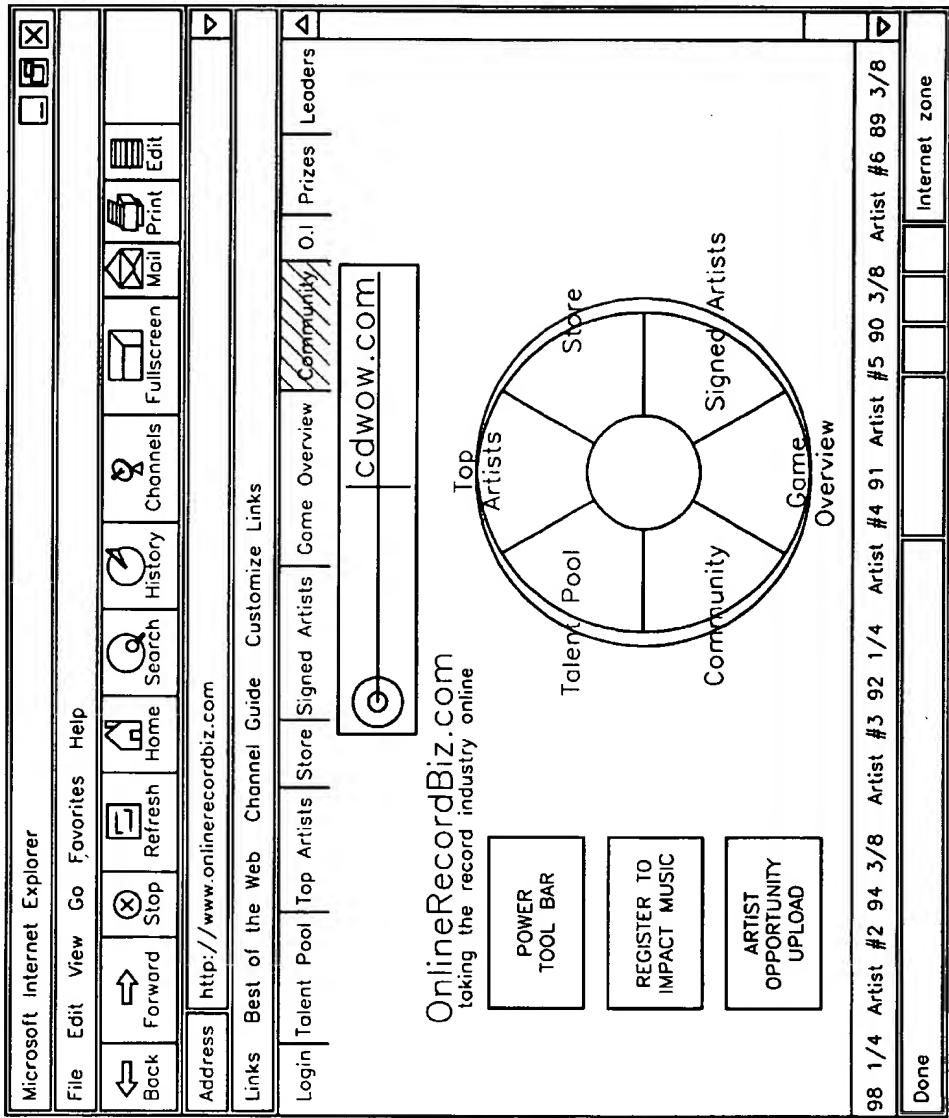
**FIG. 4**

FIG. 5



band photo

BAND NAME

song #1

sample download

song #2

sample download

song #3

sample download

BAND DESCRIPTION

genre:

location:

date joined:

influences:

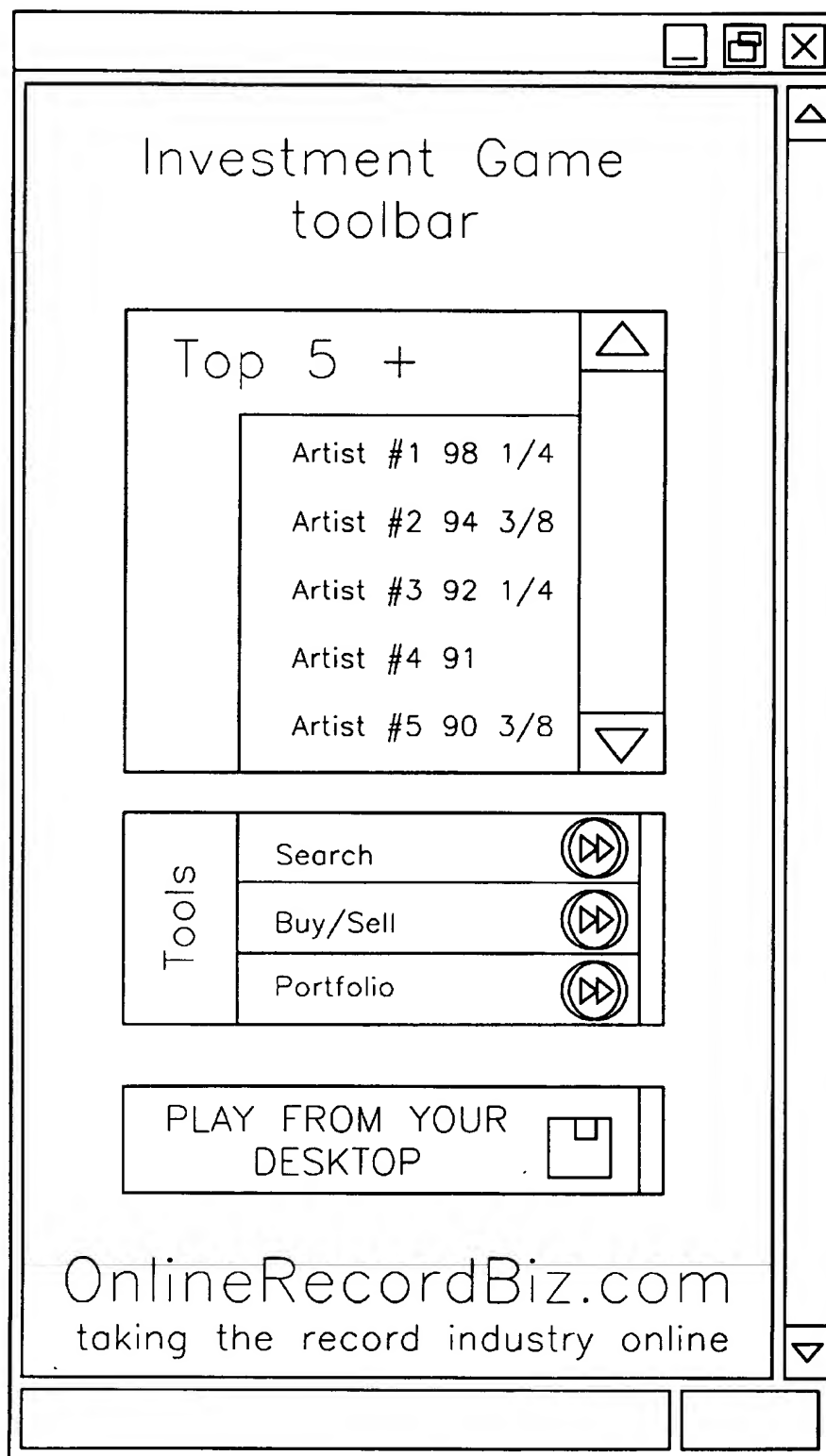
rate this band

post a message

receive email info

Internet zone

FIG. 6

**FIG. 7**

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR AN ONLINE TALENT BUSINESS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates generally to online business methods, and more specifically to a method for implementing an online record business whereby large numbers of unknown artists can have their music made available to the public and wherein the public votes on which artists they like and whereby the online record business enters into recording contracts based on the public voting.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Music is one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the world, but it is also a big business. According to the Recording Industry Association of America, domestic sales of recorded music were \$13.7 billion in 1998, or more than one-third of worldwide revenue.

Of the \$13.7 billion in revenue, "rock" remained the dominant genre, with 25.7% of the market in 1998. The next most popular category was "country," with 14.1%. Rhythm and blues ("R&B") came in next at 12.8%, with "pop" and "rap" coming in at 10.0% and 9.7%, respectively. As can be seen, these five categories of music are responsible for over 72% of all sales, and it is these genres to which the present application is directed. Moreover, the buyers of these categories of music are also the most Internet-aware.

The compact disc (CD) became the dominant format for recorded music in 1992, the year in which its market share (in terms of dollars, not units) barely exceeded that of cassettes (46.5% vs. 43.6%). However, in terms of dollars, CDs now outsell cassettes by a 5-to-1 margin. The shift to this new format did not take place overnight, but it did take place. It is Applicants' belief that the same transformation from CDs to a purely digital format is inevitable.

The sale of prerecorded music is mostly of interest to the younger consumer, and over 73% of revenue is derived from buyers aged 10-39. The importance of this is the fact that, except for the 18.1% market share attributed to buyers 45 and older, the next greatest demographic segment is buyers aged 15-19, with 15.8% of the market; and it is this category of buyer that is among the most Internet-aware.

In 1998, 85.2% of music sales took place in retail stores, with record clubs having a distant 9% share of the market. By contrast, the Internet was in distant last place at only 1.1%. Given that the market for domestic music is almost \$14 billion, each one-percent of additional market share translates into \$140 million in sale, assuming no growth in the market as a whole.

The music industry has not changed very much during the last few decades. Record companies typically require artists to sign exclusive contracts, and in exchange, the record labels develop, distribute, and promote the music. Additionally, the major record labels (as well as several "independent" labels) control, to a great extent, the type and quantity of recorded music that consumers can buy.

This existing system limits artists and consumers in the following ways:

Few artists can sell enough music to cover the high distribution and promotion costs. These costs include producing CDs and tapes, inventory and retail chain management as well as television, print and radio promotions and public relations efforts.

The majority of artists can only reach limited audiences due to finite shelf space at retailers and limited air time on

radio and television stations, thus limiting the choices available to consumers.

There is very little communication and exchange of information between artists and consumers. For example, artists do not readily know who is buying their music or how to contact them, and consumers often do not have an opportunity to interact directly with their favorite artists.

Because of these limitations, the number of artists served by the existing music distribution system is small compared to the universe of musicians with commercial aspirations. According to a recent Gallup poll, over 25% of the U.S. population over the age of twelve, or 53 million people, are active music-makers. In addition, according to the National Association of Music Merchants, approximately 62% of U.S. households contain an amateur musician. These musicians represent a broad spectrum of artists including hobbyists, amateurs, semi-professional and professional musicians.

The World-Wide Web is also emerging as an important source of music, dramatically altering the way consumers discover, listen to and purchase music. According to Jupiter Communications, domestic sales of recorded music over the Internet are projected to grow from approximately \$327 million in 1999 to \$2.6 billion in 2002. The Web offers music fans major advantages over traditional media, such as unprecedented interactivity and access to new and archived music content on demand. Since music initially appeared on the Web, the number and types of music Web sites have expanded to include content, e-commerce and downloadable music sites. As a result, both consumers and artists have embraced the Web as an attractive medium for exploring and distributing music content. Forrester Research estimates that approximately 50 million individuals will be capable of downloading and playing digital music by the end of 1999. In addition, a number of artists, such as Public Enemy, Green Day, Hole and Todd Rundgren, either sell CDs directly through their Web sites or allow visitors to purchase and download digital music.

In recent years, consumers have increasingly used their computers to play music. Dataquest estimates that in 1998, 30% of U.S. households had multimedia PCs with a sound card, speakers and either a CD-ROM or DVD-ROM drive. Consumers can now play CDs on their computers with the ease and fidelity formerly associated only with stereo systems.

However, music files can be very large. For example, a three-minute song can occupy more than thirty megabytes of storage. Storing and transferring audio files can be expensive and slow. To address this problem, compression formats have been developed. One of the first widely accepted standards for the compression of music was "mp3", adopted by the Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG). There are also competitive formats that may receive more widespread industry and consumer acceptance. These formats have different and additional features including SDMI (Secure Digital Music Initiative) and proprietary audio formats from companies like Microsoft Corporation and AT&T Corp. The mp3 standard offers at least 10:1 compression and audio integrity at near-CD quality. Mp3 playback is currently available on most operating environments including Microsoft Windows 95, Windows 98, Windows NT and MacOS, most major versions of UNIX and many other operating environments.

Capitalizing on the growing popularity of mp3, Diamond Multimedia Systems, Inc. introduced the Rio, the first commercially available mp3 portable player, in November 1998.

Over 250,000 units have been sold to date. Several other manufacturers, including Creative Labs, Thompson Multimedia's RCA division, LG Electronics and Samsung, have recently released or announced plans to sell portable mp3 players.

The development of compression formats like mp3 has made it practical to transmit music over the Internet. However, until recently there have been few legitimate sources of downloadable music on the Internet.

The distribution method of recorded music has changed very little over time. Until recently, a typical arrangement required solid relationships between recording companies and distributors. It is believed that eventually, recording companies may distribute digitally their music directly to the consumer.

The following discussion relates to currently-available online promotion and distribution of music and music-related products.

Traditional music industries companies, including BMG Entertainment, a unit of Bertelsmann AG; EMI Group plc; Sony Corporation; Time Warner, Inc. and Universal Music Group, a unit of the Seagram Company Ltd. have recently entered in the online commercial community and are currently backing the SDMI security format.

Examples of providers of online music content are Emusic.com Inc. (formerly GoodNoise Corporation), Launch Media, Inc., Mp3.com, Musicmaker.com, and Tunes.com. Some of these companies offer artist services.

Examples of companies offering mp3 or other audio compression formats are AT&T Corp., IBM Corporation, Liquid Audio, Inc., Microsoft Corporation and RealNetworks, Inc. Some of these companies also offer customers the ability to download music from their web sites.

Examples of online music retailers are Amazon.com, Inc. and CDNow Inc., as well as online "portals" such as American Online, Inc., Excite, Inc., Infoseek Corporation, Lycos, Inc. and Yahoo, Inc.

In particular, Amazon.com has announced its launch of a digital-download area on its Web site, allowing free song downloads. In addition, America Online recently announced its acquisition of two Internet music companies, Spinner Networks, Inc. and Nullsoft, Inc. and stated its intent to offer downloadable music in leading formats.

Other companies have agreed to work together to offer music over the Internet. For example, in May 1999, Microsoft Corporation and Sony Corporation announced an agreement to pursue a number of cooperative activities. Sony has announced that it will make its music content downloadable from the Internet using Microsoft's multimedia software. In addition, Universal Music Group and BMG Entertainment have announced a joint venture to form an online music store, and Musicmaker.com recently announced that it signed an exclusive 5-year-licensing agreement for EMI's music catalogue for custom compilation CDs.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,237,157 (Kaplan) discloses a user interactive multi-media based point-of-preview system. In particular, this system comprises a kiosk station at which a user can preview music available on CDs at a retail store.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,963,916 (Kaplan) discloses a system for online user interactive multimedia based point-of-preview. An improvement to U.S. Pat. No. 5,237,157 (Kaplan), this system basically integrates a network web site as the source of pre-recorded products.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,629,867 (Goldman) discloses a digital radio broadcast station which includes a single online digital database having stored therein a plurality of at least several hundred different selections of music to be played and broadcast by the radio station.

In view of all of the above, there remains a need for an online record business that provides talent recruitment world-wide, from any artist that wishes to participate. Furthermore, there remains a need for an online record business that presents these artists' works for review by the consuming public and then obtains feedback from the consuming public on which artists the consuming public prefers. Finally, there remains a need for an online record business that awards recording contracts to participating artists based on the consuming public feedback.

OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, it is the general object of this invention to provide an apparatus which improves upon and overcomes the disadvantages of the prior art.

It is another object of this invention to provide a method and system for implementing an online record business.

It is still another object of this invention to provide a method and system for implementing an online record business that provides for talent recruitment from artists world-wide.

It is still another object of this invention to provide a method and system for implementing an online record business that permits any artist to participate in the world-wide talent recruitment.

It is still another object of this invention to provide a method and system for accelerating and streamlining the process through which the record industry recruits new talent.

It is still yet a further object of this invention to provide for decreased talent acquisition costs, decreased marketing costs and decreased production costs.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a method and system for implementing an online record business that provides for retrieving and analyzing music-listening consumer feedback.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide an interactive investment simulation game.

It is even a further object of this invention to provide a method and system for implementing an online record business that awards recording contracts based on the feedback from the music-listening consumer feedback.

It is even yet a further object of this invention to provide a virtual record label.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a method and system that offers participating artists the opportunity to upload and promote their music through their own Web page.

It still yet another object of this invention to provide a method and system for participating recording artists to reap the benefits of a multi-million dollar marketing campaign without spending any additional money of their own.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a method for providing one of the largest collections of music available online.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a method for browsing the large collection of music using multiple genre and geographical search classifications.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a method and system for providing an interactive music-based game for obtaining consuming public feedback.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a method and system for purchasing music in a cost and time efficient manner.

It is still yet another object of this invention to provide a method and system for building brand awareness through a combination of online and off-line advertising and promotional activities.

It is even yet a further object of this invention to provide a method and system for identifying international artists to add to the talent pool.

It is even yet another object of this invention to provide a method and system for multiple language content, multi-level geographical indexing, global reach and rankings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

These and other objects of the instant invention are achieved by providing a method for recruiting artists (e.g., musicians, models, authors, etc.) world-wide having artistic works (e.g., music, appearance, story scripts, etc.). The method comprises the steps of: (a) providing a web site over global computer networks (e.g., the Internet) by a support entity (e.g., an online record business, modeling business, story-scripting business, etc.); (b) communicating with the web site by the artists world-wide for uploading representations of their respective artistic works and personal information for evaluation by the support entity that supports the web site in order to recruit the artists; and (c) making each of the respective artistic works and personal information available to the consuming public for the review of the consuming public via the web site.

These and other objects of the instant invention are also achieved by providing a method for obtaining consumer feedback world-wide regarding artistic works (e.g., music, appearance, story scripts, etc.) by artists (e.g., musicians, models, authors, etc.). The method comprises the steps of: (a) providing a web site over global computer networks (e.g., the Internet) that make the artistic works available for consideration by the consuming public and wherein the web site is supported by a support entity (e.g., an online record business, modeling business, story-scripting business, etc.); and (b) communicating with the web site by the consuming public for providing feedback (e.g., using an interactive artist-investment simulation game) as to those artistic works that are preferred by the consuming public.

These and other objects of the instant invention are also achieved by providing a system for recruiting artists (e.g., musicians, models, authors, etc.) world-wide having artistic works () and wherein the artistic works are loadable onto global computer networks (e.g., the Internet). The system comprises: a web site available on the global computer networks; an artist database in communication with the web site; and an artist works database in communication with the web site. The web site stores artist information in the artist database and stores the artistic works in the artist works database for consideration by the consuming public via the web site. The web site, artist database and artist works database are supported by a support entity (e.g., an online record business, modeling business, story-scripting business, etc.).

These and other objects of the instant invention are also achieved by providing a system for obtaining consumer feedback (e.g., via an interactive artist-investment simulation game) world-wide regarding artistic works (e.g., music, appearance, story scripts, etc.) wherein the artistic works are loadable onto global computer networks (e.g., the Internet). The system comprises: a web site available on the global

computer networks; an artist database in communication with the web site; an artist works database in communication with the web site; an end-user database in communication with the web site; a statistics database in communication with the web site; and content databases in communication with the web site. The web site stores artist information in the artist database, stores the artistic works in the artist works database, stores artist content in the content databases, stores consuming public information in the end-user database and stores web site use information by the consuming public in the statistics database. The artist database and the artist works database are searchable by the consuming public for consideration by the consuming public world-wide via the content database. In addition, the end-user database and the statistics database are utilized for analyzing the consuming public feedback.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other objects and many of the attendant advantages of this invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a method of an online business that recruits artistic talent world-wide using the Internet and also which utilizes consumer feedback to determine which artists are preferred by the consuming public;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a method of an online record business that recruits artistic talent world-wide using the Internet and also which utilizes consumer feedback to determine which artists are preferred by the consuming public;

FIG. 3A is a block diagram of the main functions available to the user of the web site provided by the online record business;

FIG. 3B is a functional diagram of the online record business;

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a system that depicts an implementation of the method for the online record business.

FIG. 5 is a display screen view of the home page web site for the online record business;

FIG. 6 is a display screen view of an exemplary unsigned artist profile available at the web site of the online record business; and

FIG. 7 is a pop-up toolbar for the interactive investment simulation game.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring now in detail to the various figures of the drawing wherein like reference characters refer to like parts, there is shown at 10 in FIG. 1, a block diagram of a method of an online business 11 that recruits artistic talent 12 world-wide using the Internet and that also utilizes consumer feedback to determine which artists are preferred by the consuming public 13 so that a contract can be awarded from a contracting entity 14 to the preferred artists. The online business 11 basically comprises a web site 15 and the support entity 16 that runs the online business 11 and operates the web site 15. Artists from around the world, can upload representations of their respective works, as well as personal information, to the web site 15. The online business 11 then organizes the artist information and artistic works via artist profiles (to be discussed in detail later) that are

available to the consuming public 13 at the web site 15. The consuming public can then review any artist and his/her respective artistic works. In addition, the consuming public can provide input (e.g., where the online business 11 is an online record label, the consuming public can "rate an artist's band" or post a message about the artist/band) via the artist profile (see FIG. 6).

Furthermore, to obtain consuming public 13 feedback regarding those artists preferred by the consuming public 13, an interactive investment simulation game 30 (as will be discussed in detail later) is available via the web site. In particular, all of the unsigned artists/artistic works are pre-selected by talent representatives of the online business (e.g., in the record business, the online record business uses artist and repertoire (A&R) representatives; see FIG. 3B; similarly, in the modeling business or story-scripting business analogous pre-selecting personnel are used) to determine their eligibility for the interactive simulation game 30. Those artists considered eligible to participate in the interactive investment simulation game 30 can be "voted on" by the consuming public 13 through virtual stock bought and sold by the consuming public 13, as will be discussed in detail later. Based on those artist(s) preferred by the consuming public, the online business 11 then awards those artists contracts and implements the contracts.

It should be understood that the method 10 set forth above has applications in many types of businesses, such as the record business, the modeling business, the story-scripting business, etc. When applied to the record business (as will be discussed in detail below), the support entity 16 is a record label and the artists/work 12 are musicians that want to promote their music/video; when applied to the modeling industry, the support entity 16 may be an online modeling agency seeking models to promote their clients' products or operation/services and the models send pertinent information (e.g., images, photographs, etc.) to the modeling agency 16 for consideration; when applied to the story scripting business, the support entity 16 may be a publisher or movie production company seeking a story line for a new book or movie. One of the key features of the method 10 is that it provides an artist, anywhere in the world, with the ability to have his/her talent presented to the consuming public for their consideration, thereby avoiding the current hurdles of not being able to even "get a foot in the door." Another key feature of the method 10 is that it lets the consuming public 13 decide who should be promoted to the next stage, i.e., contract, of bringing a new work of art to the world, thereby avoiding the support agency 16 always making that determination for the consuming public 13. For example, in the record industry, the record labels alone make the decision of which artists will be promoted.

FIG. 2 depicts the method 10 implemented in the record business and is hereinafter referred to as the method 20. In particular, the method 20 comprises an online record business 21 that operates, supports and maintains a web site 25. As also shown in FIG. 2, the Online record business 21 is known as "OnlineRecordBiz.com" and supports the web site 25 having that URL (uniform resource locator). Unsigned recording artists 22, from around the world, interface with the online record business 21 via the Internet by uploading their music and personal information to the web site 25. By providing this interface, the online record business 21 greatly assists the unsigned artists 22 by avoiding all of the "hype" (at great expense and time to the artists 22) that normally would need to be created before a record label would even "give em a chance". In addition, the consuming public 13 can then access the web site 25 and review the

various unsigned artists' music/information and listen to the artists' music. Following the pre-selecting of all of these unsigned artists by A&R representatives, the consuming public 13 can then "vote" (as will be discussed in detail later) on which artists' 22 music they prefer via the interactive investment simulation game 30. Since record labels are in the business to make money, the online record business 21 will award recording contracts to those unsigned artists 22 that are most preferred by the consuming public 13. Thus, the consuming public 13 drives the awarding of recording contracts, rather than the record label driving the awarding of recording contracts.

It should also be understood that the term "artist" when used with regard to the online record business means an artist as an individual or artist as a band.

FIG. 3A depicts a block diagram of the main functions available to the user of the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25. Through this web site 25, OnlineRecordBiz.com finds the best new artists from around the world, determines new artists' success potential before signing, markets its artists, and distribute its artists' music and merchandise. This method 20 provides for decreased talent acquisition costs, decreased marketing costs, and decreased production costs. In particular, users of the web site 25 can utilize the extensive unsigned artist database 28 which includes pictures, profiles and mp3 files. The users can also utilize an interactive investment simulation game 30, a community center 32 with bulletin boards, chat rooms and e-mail. The users can also utilize an online store 34 for music and merchandise distribution.

The unsigned artist database (also referred to as the "unsigned artist talent pool") 28 comprises an extensive database of unsigned recording artists 28 developed through both online and offline marketing techniques. Each artist is presented with the opportunity to create and maintain his/her own no-cost web page on the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25, known as artist profiles (see FIG. 6). Within their profiles, the artists share their relevant information, photographic images, at least one song, and one music video (if available). In particular, artists upload a photographic image, a text-based profile, up to three mp3 files and one video file. This is accomplished in a "do-it-yourself" fashion similar to the method used by GeoCities in permitting users to create their own pages. Furthermore, OnlineRecordBiz.com employs experienced talent scouts (i.e., the A&R representatives) to track the recording artists that join its talent pool. Talent scouts have access to daily, detailed statistics regarding each unsigned artist profile, including how many users traffic the profile, how many songs were listened to and downloaded, as well as access to interactive opinion polls and newsgroups contained within the artist profile. Those top artists are then invited to join the interactive investment simulation game 30 through which OnlineRecordBiz.com determines the actual appeal of the unsigned artist.

The interactive investment simulation game 30 is the key tool in evaluating the actual demand of the unsigned artists. Through the interactive investment simulation game 30, users virtually buy and sell stock in the more than 50 unsigned artists with imaginary money. Every few days, OnlineRecordBiz.com adds more unsigned artists to the interactive investment simulation game 30. Prices of the imaginary stocks are driven by the actual supply and demand as dictated by the traders. The top traders for each month or quarter receive various prizes such as T-shirts, CD's, cash and even a new car. In addition, the web site 25 includes a feedback section so that web site visitors can post

their comments about the recording artist. Users who participate in the interactive investment simulation game 30 compete against thousands of other users daily in order to earn a variety of prizes. Moreover, through participation in the game, users actually take part in determining the next interactive investment simulation game 30 signed artist. The combination of the enjoyment and fun of the game with the power of the experience creates an exciting opportunity to OnlineRecordBiz.com users.

As mentioned previously, OnlineRecordBiz.com also uses A&R (Artist and Repertoire) representatives to watch the results of the interactive investment simulation game 30 to determine which unsigned recording artists have received the most favorable reception by the public. The artists that excel in the game 30 (i.e., the highest stock price) are traditionally scouted by the A&R representatives. If decided appropriate, those artists are then offered a recording contract with OnlineRecordBiz.com.

Once a particular artist warrants a OnlineRecordBiz.com contract (as reflected by the investment simulation game 30) OnlineRecordBiz.com actually signs the artist to a recording contract, utilizing several new media and traditional music industry marketing strategies to market its artists. For example, when OnlineRecordBiz.com signs a new artist to a recording contract, the company's site, the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25, features a 15 to 30 second animated introduction to introduce the new artist (e.g., see www.3dfx.com for a similar experience). The introduction contains information on the artist, graphics, and the artist's actual music as the user enjoys an exciting and unique experience. Furthermore, OnlineRecordBiz.com provides an individual web site for each of its signed artists. The site includes profile information, concert information, discographies, online videos, and other relevant information. After OnlineRecordBiz.com signs a particular artist, users receive a direct e-mail containing the signed artist's profile information, an attached digital download, an instant play hyperlink and a compact disc order form. In order to provide links to the new artist's web site, OnlineRecordBiz.com purchases banner advertisements on appropriate web sites to attract more potential users of the web site 25. In addition, OnlineRecordBiz.com uses television promotions, radio promotions, record store promotions and music videos to generate as much interest as possible in artists signed by OnlineRecordBiz.com. Furthermore, through the online store 34, OnlineRecordBiz.com offers users the opportunity to purchase signed artists' music, and merchandise directly through its site.

In addition to the unsigned artist talent database 28 and the interactive investment simulation game 30, OnlineRecordBiz.com offers services designed to instill a sense of community in the web site 25. Among these are e-mail accounts, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and interactive games. The web site 25 permits fans to contact artists directly via e-mail and to communicate with one another through message boards and chat. In addition, artists can use their artist profile to communicate directly with their fans, advising them of concerts and new releases and developing a fan email list.

The result of the method 20 is fourfold. First, it accelerates and streamlines the process through which the record industry recruits new talent. Second, the power to choose which recording artists become commercially popular resides in the hands of the consumer. As opposed to music being "pushed" through the channel by today's entertainment companies, music is "pulled" through by consumers who decide what they want to hear through the method 20.

Third, consumers have more music from more recording artists from which they can choose. Fourth, the industry experiences major "disintermediation," i.e., that dependence on a middle-man between suppliers and buyers (i.e., a retailer) is greatly reduced or eliminated. In order to better understand the value of the method 20, consider a brief examination of each of the four aforementioned results:

With regard to talent recruitment, by using the World Wide Web as its headquarters, OnlineRecordBiz.com essentially has a talent scout wherever there is a connection to the Internet, be it in North America, Asia, Europe or anywhere in the world. Therefore, OnlineRecordBiz.com has access to the best new talent from around the world before any other traditional music company.

With regard to consumer feedback, while traditional music companies rely solely upon their executives to predict those artists that will achieve commercial success, OnlineRecordBiz.com lets the music buying public decide. OnlineRecordBiz.com only signs those artists that have proven to be popular by the music-buying public. In doing so, OnlineRecordBiz.com greatly reduces the inefficiency currently plaguing the traditional music industry.

With regard to the consumers' music choice, via the expanding collection of artists in the unsigned artist database 28, the consuming public is provided with one of the largest databases of musical content available on the Internet. Consumers can listen to real-time or streaming audio or download thousands of songs posted on the web site 25 by artists to their personal computers free of charge, twenty-four hours a day. The music collection spans dozens of categorized genres, including pop, rock, classical, country, alternative, children's, easy listening, electronic, hip hop, rap, blues, jazz, international. Those music categories are searchable by genre, artists or location.

With regard to industry "disintermediation," once OnlineRecordBiz.com signs a particular artist to a recording contract, the company then makes that signed artist's music available for purchase in all reasonable formats, including digital, compact disk, and cassette tape, directly within the company web site 25. Considering that consumers (potential music buyers) already traffic the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25, it makes sense for the consumer to purchase the signed artist's music directly through the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25 and not a traditional third party retailer. As consumer acceptance of the new digital distribution systems pick up, OnlineRecordBiz.com completely eliminates the need for a distributor and retailer, greatly increasing the revenue of OnlineRecordBiz.com as well as its artist.

FIG. 4 is a diagram of a system 120 that depicts an implementation of the method 20 for the online record business. In general, the system uses servers, networks, computer terminals and other conventional systems, subsystems and components that are known in the art which are necessary for Internet communication.

In particular, the system comprises a plurality of consuming public and unsigned artist terminals 122 for interaction with the Internet 124. OnlineRecordBiz.com's web site 25, as will be discussed in detail, is available via the Internet 124. The web site 25 communicates with, and maintains, a plurality of relational databases, namely, an artist database 126, a music database 128, an e-commerce database 130 and an end-user database 132. These databases are used to enhance the user experience at the web site 25 and to provide OnlineRecordBiz.com with valuable information for marketing and sales activities. Content databases 134 make content available for download, CD purchase, web site

ranking and cataloging and are updated as artists and users interact with the web site 25. Statistics databases 136 maintain traffic and site analysis information including the number of times that web pages were viewed, download counts and artist/song rankings. The end-user database 132 and e-commerce database 130, which are firewalled for protection, contain customer information and transaction histories.

As mentioned previously, each participating artist has his/her artist profile 138 within the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25 as supported by, among other things, the artist database 126 and the music database 128. It should be understood that the artist database 126 and the music database 128 encompass the unsigned artist database 28 mentioned earlier.

Finally, other links 140 (e.g., ticketing agencies) are also available via the Internet 124 as part of the system 120.

The technology infrastructure is based on architecture designed to be secure, reliable and expandable. Software used in the system 120 is a combination of proprietary applications, third party database software, and open operating systems that support acquisition of content, management of that content, publication of the web site 25, downloads of music and media files, registration and tracking of users, reporting of information for both internal and external use.

The infrastructure is designed to allow each component to be independently scaled, usually by purchasing additional readily-available hardware and software components, to meet or exceed future capacity requirements.

All servers, networks and systems are monitored on a continuous basis. Numerous levels of firewall systems are implemented to protect the databases, electronic commerce servers, customer information and music archive. Backups of all databases, data and media files are performed on a daily basis. Data back-up takes are archived at a remote location on a weekly basis.

The OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25 can support new technology formats and standards, including a variety of leading audio compression formats. Music is offered in both the mp3 and RealAudio formats, as well as in the still popular CD format.

The web site 25 incorporates the latest technologies, featuring the use of Macromedia's Flash 4 and Shockwave to make the web site 25 one of the most exciting and creative destinations on the web. Moreover, the site offers four to five languages other than English.

The OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25 is discussed in further detail below. It should be understood that although record industry terminology and symbology are shown in FIGS. 5-7, it is within the broadest scope of this application to include other industry/business terminology and symbology, e.g., the modeling industry and story-scripting business, in each of those figures; thus, as a result, FIGS. 5-7 are exemplary only in that other industries/businesses may modify the language and icons of FIGS. 5-7 to meet their respective terminologies and symbologies.

As mentioned previously, a 15-second powerful introduction greets the user to the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25, introducing the company through a powerful flash presentation incorporating text, graphics, and music (see www.balthaser.com for a similar experience). Upon completion of the introduction, the OnlineRecordBiz.com home page (FIG. 5) is loaded along with the Investment Game Toolbar pop-up window (FIG. 7).

The home page (FIG. 5) links the user to five optional sections: (1) the OnlineRecordBiz.com Talent Pool, (2) Top

Artists, (3) the OnlineRecordBiz.com Brand Store, (4) OnlineRecordBiz.com Artists (4) the Investment Game Overview, and (5) the OnlineRecordBiz.com Community Center (OnlineRecordBiz.com Lounge). Each option is presented through an image map showing partial graphics of each individual station compiled into one circular graphic (see www.millerbrewing.com as a reference). A navigation bar is displayed along the top window margin of the OnlineRecordBiz.com home page. The user can find links to the several important OnlineRecordBiz.com sections and services. Among those sections included on the toolbar are: Login/Register, Talent Pool, Top Artists, Store, OnlineRecordBiz.com Artists, Game Overview, Community, DJ, Prizes, and Leaders. A real time ticker showing the updated artist price quotes of that particular user's portfolio sits along the bottom margin of the OnlineRecordBiz.com home page. The ticker resembles those tickers found on nonfantasy investment sites. The user can click on a particular ticker symbol to view a description of the artist.

The OnlineRecordBiz.com Talent Pool: The talent pool is the unsigned artist section of the OnlineRecordBiz.com site. As mentioned earlier, users can view profiles 138 (FIG. 6) of artists contained within the extensive pool of unsigned artists that appear on the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25. Each profile 138 contains important information about the artist. In the upper left corner of the profile window is a picture of the artist. To the right and below the picture is the artist's name, songs available for sampling and download, a brief description, and other relevant information. Below the artist's description is an interactive weekly survey (e.g. generating opinion polls), a link to that artist's individual newsgroup (e.g., for disseminating information about the artists and the consuming public input), and a button allowing users to "join this band's email list" (e.g., using e-mail listserves).

Top Artist Stocks: The music artist stocks offered section of the site links the user to a list of all of those artists available for ranking on the Investment Game (music artists that can be traded in the game) and their current stock price. The artists are categorized into nine categories: (1) hip hop, (2) R&B, (3) jazz, (4) classical, (5) new age, (6) pop, (7) alternative, (8) rock/pop, and (9) country. Each band name listed is linked to that artist's profile.

The OnlineRecordBiz.com Records Store: In the OnlineRecordBiz.com Records store users can purchase OnlineRecordBiz.com music and brand-name merchandise. Among the merchandise offered is OnlineRecordBiz.com signed artists' downloadable digital and deliverable CD and cassette tape music, OnlineRecordBiz.com T-shirts, Polo shirts, hats, sweatshirts, mugs, distinctive shot glasses, books, lighters, can openers, pitchers, mouse pads, and others.

OnlineRecordBiz.com Signed Artists: In the OnlineRecordBiz.com Signed Artist sections users find information on the signed OnlineRecordBiz.com artists. Each artist has his/her own web site within the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25 that features information on the artist, including profile information, concert information, discographies, online videos, and other relevant information. As more artists are signed, this section grows to be an invaluable marketing tool for OnlineRecordBiz.com.

The Game Overview: The Game Overview is the "how to play" section of the OnlineRecordBiz.com web site 25. The interactive teaching instrument educates the user through a logical progression of flowing page interactions, as well as contains specific links to other help sections. One example

13

of a similar instructional resource can be found at Miller Brewing Company's web site at www.millerbrewing.com/a_lite_section/index.asp (see Pilsner Beer Story) and the Esignal web site at www.esignal.com/flash_demo.htm.

The OnlineRecordBiz.com Community Center (The OnlineRecordBiz.com Lounge): The OnlineRecordBiz.com Community Center offers many of those options found on a standard music community web site such as Billboard Online and Rolling Stone Online. Among those options are live concerts, chat sessions, daily news, newsgroups, and email. In addition to those common features, OnlineRecordBiz.com offers the OnlineRecordBiz.com leader board, OnlineRecordBiz.com postcards, OnlineRecordBiz.com member web pages, and OnlineRecordBiz.com interactive games.

The OnlineRecordBiz.com Power Toolbar (FIG. 7) is an individual pop-up window that acts as OnlineRecordBiz.com Record's consumer feedback portion of the web site 25. Within this section, all artists involved in the interactive investment simulation game 30 are listed along with the user's buy/sell tools and other necessary features.

At the top of the window is the OnlineRecordBiz.com game logo. Below the OnlineRecordBiz.com logo is a scrollable ranking of the artists in the OnlineRecordBiz.com game. Each name contains a hyperlink to each artist's profile 138. The top five artists are visible at window launch, but all others can be reached through the scrollbar.

Below the OnlineRecordBiz.com artist list is the user's investment toolbar. With the toolbar, the user can utilize three features: (1) enter a quick search of a particular artist's name or ticker symbol, (2) buy or sell a particular quantity of shares, and (3) see his/her current revenue and portfolio. Each individual feature links to a new window. The quick search feature links to a full description of the particular searched artist. The buying and selling tools link to a confirmation screen that finalizes the trade. When the user clicks on the portfolio link, he/she can view his/her current artist stocks, balance, and other relevant information. Below the portfolio is a description of each prize the user can win if he/she attains a certain amount of money. Below the OnlineRecordBiz.com Investment Toolbar the user can download a desktop version of the Investment Challenge and link back to the OnlineRecordBiz.com home page (FIG. 5).

Without further elaboration, the foregoing will so fully illustrate my invention that others may, by applying current or future knowledge, readily adopt the same for use under various conditions of service.

I claim:

1. A method for recruiting artists world-wide having artistic works, said method comprising the steps of:

- (a) providing a web site over global computer networks by a support entity for recruiting artists;
- (b) communicating with said web site by the artists world-wide for uploading representations of their respective artistic works and personal information to said web site in order to recruit the artists;
- (c) making at least one of the respective artistic works and personal information available to the consuming public for the review of the consuming public via said web site;

14

(d) obtaining consumer feedback from the consuming public via said web site regarding which of the artistic works the consuming public prefers; and

(e) engaging those artists in contracts with said support entity or with a third party associated with said support entity based on said consumer feedback.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of generating an opinion poll based on said consumer feedback.

3. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of utilizing newsgroups over said global computer networks for disseminating information about the artists and said consumer feedback.

4. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of utilizing e-mail listserves for disseminating artist information to individuals of the consuming public that have selected to receive such information.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of providing said online record business with daily, detailed information regarding how many people reviewed each of said artist profiles and how many people listened to their songs.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein said daily, detailed information further comprises how many people downloaded their songs.

7. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of providing multiple language content at said web site for permitting the recruitment of artist talent world-wide.

8. A system for recruiting artists world-wide having artistic works wherein the artistic works are loadable onto global computer networks and wherein said system is operated by a support entity, said system comprising:

- a web site available on the global computer networks;
- an artist database in communication with said web site;
- an artist works database in communication with said web site;
- an end-user database in communication with said web site;
- a statistics database in communication with said web site; and

content databases in communication with said web site, said web site storing artist information in said artist database, storing the artistic works in said artist work database, storing artist content in said content databases, storing consuming public information in said end-user database and storing web site use information by the consuming public in said statistics database, said artist database and said artist works database being searchable by the consuming public for consideration by the consuming public world-wide via said content databases, and wherein said end-user database and said statistics database are utilized for analyzing said consuming public feedback and for engaging those artists in contracts with said support entity or with a third party associated with said support entity based on said consumer feedback.

9. The system of claim 8 wherein said artistic work is music, wherein said artistic work database is a music database and wherein said web site is an online record business web site.

* * * * *